

Lead Kindly Light – An Examination of Conscience

“And spurned on by the method to return to myself, I entered into my deepest interior, led by You. There I was in a state such that You became my helper. I entered and looking with my mind’s eye – how weak it is – I saw above this eye, above my spirit, a constant Light.”
St Augustine, Confessions

Some medieval theologians and mystics taught that God is the Light by which our souls see and interpret the world, by which we know ourselves to be made in the Image of God, having a share in God’s creativity and grace. This Light illuminates the way we think about life, use the gifts of creation, and love our neighbour. First we must begin the journey inward guided by Jesus, who is also the teacher within us (the Light that enlightens every mind), who first challenges our will and examines our motives and attitudes to the world and is finally that Light which makes us just and prepares us for the Kingdom of God.

Inspired by Augustine’s thought and a reading of Matthew 25.1-13, this meditation is also informed by the Exercises of St Ignatius. The essential part of the Exercises is the examination of conscience, which helps us to discover how God has been present throughout our day and to discover areas of our lives that need further growth and healing. This is an evening meditation that should be led by one calm and patient voice. It is best not to be either too hurried or too intense. Whilst people gather some quiet music can be played in the background. Before the meditation begins another voice may read Matthew 25.11-3 or the meditation can begin immediately with the verse:

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

All pray together:

God,
unto whom all hearts are open,
all desires are known,
from whom no secret thing is hidden,
we ask you
to cleanse the purpose of our hearts
with the unspeakable gift of your grace
that we may perfectly love you
and worthily praise you.¹ Amen

The facilitator slowly invites the participants to relax and become open to God by first becoming aware of their surroundings, of the weight of their bodies, and by letting go of mental distractions before finally concentrating on their breathing. After this the facilitator invites them to become aware of the light of God within them...

- 1) Ask God to kindle the fire of God’s light in you and help you to examine your inward self so that you can be free of those things that cloud the Image of God in you and sto you from reflecting the Light of Christ’s justice in the world.
- 2) Give thanks to God for the good things that you have received. Reflect on what has happened today that has made you aware of the Image of God in creation, humanity, and in yourself.
- 3) Begin to examine your inward self by remembering your day, from the moment you woke until the present, hour by hour, period by period:
 - a) Examine your thoughts:
 - What was your first thought upon waking?



- Did anything prevent you from seeing God in your work and in the people you met?
- Did you allow money or other worldly things to become your priority or to separate you from others?

(These questions are only suggestions; try not to cover too much in one meditation.)

- b) Examine your words:
- Did desire or the demands of work stop you from speaking the truth?
 - Did you use words to welcome the stranger and understand the excluded?
 - Did you fail to be a voice for the poor and oppressed?
- c) Examine your actions:
- Have you used your time and money justly, respecting the labour and needs of others?
 - Have you acted without being aware of your effect on the environment and the human family?
 - Does your work and lifestyle express your creativity and share in the creativity of others? What is your gift?

4) Invite participants to ask for forgiveness and imagine the Light of God now kindly purifying their inward selves and restoring the Image of God within them.

5) Finally invite participants to resolve to live more soulfully with their eyes more closely on the Kingdom and to ask God's grace and guidance in this.

And close with this prayer, saying together:

Lord, Jesus, Wisdom from the Father,
 Give us a share in your wisdom,
 That we might think, speak and act
 According to your goodness
 Every moment of our lives.
 Save us from being led into the
 Company of evil; from selfish works
 And from words that destroy.
 Have mercy on your creatures
 And compassion on me, a sinner. Amen ²

A song may be sung and before departing the participants bless each other:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all ever more.
 Amen

¹ From the 'Cloud of Unknowing,' a medieval English mystical manual.

² Adapted by Andrew Scott and Emma Sargsyan from the Armenian Orthodox Liturgy for Holy Tuesday.