

Examining our Lives in the Light of Mary

By Eileen Thompson

The month of May is called the month of Mary. Therefore, on the first Saturday in May friends of Schoenstatt of Indiana met at Blessed Sacrament Church in West Lafayette to pray the scriptural Rosary, celebrate Mass, enjoy some light refreshments and conversation and hear a reflection by Schoenstatt Sister of Mary, Ann Astell, called "Examining our Lives in the Light of Mary".



Sister Ann began her talk by sharing a prayer written by Schoenstatt founder, Father Joseph Kentenich, to encourage participants to develop a deep self-knowledge.



Fr. Ted Kudzinski, pastor of Blessed Sacrament, celebrates Mass providing food for the soul.

Father Kentenich wrote the following prayer while he was a very young man. "Hail Mary, for the sake of your purity, keep me pure in body and soul. Open wide to me your heart and the heart of your Son. Implore for me a deep self-knowledge and the grace of perseverance and faithfulness until death. Grant me souls and keep all else for yourself."

One of Father Kentenich's earliest followers, Joseph Engling, also prayed a similar prayer in his *Spiritual Diary*. In it, he writes, "Dear little Mother, let me recognize my faults more clearly. I know I am a poor sinner, but show me my weaknesses, so that I can put my hands to their roots. Mother, lead me!"

As children, before making our first confession, we may remember being taught to reflect on the Ten Commandments or perhaps the seven deadly sins or even the works of mercy as outlined in Matthew 25 as helpful guides to examine our consciences. And, these are indeed very good helps in rooting out those weaknesses to which we all fall prey. However, Sister Ann also expounded upon a method first introduced by Jesuit founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and later employed and embraced by Schoenstatt founder, Father Kentenich. That very practical method of self-knowledge is the daily Examen.

According to Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J., "The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us."

Sister Ann said that Father Kentenich used to describe the daily Examen as climbing up a ladder. When you first begin examining your day everything is in a muddle. You might be confused by certain events which happened during the day. (You are at the bottom of the ladder.) But, after reviewing the day in Mary's motherly presence, asking her what happened and asking the Holy Spirit to recall key moments when God was calling to you, speaking to you through people and events, then you begin to see the events of the day from God's perspective. (You are at the top of the ladder.)

Other steps which can help you get to the top of the ladder include reviewing the day with thanksgiving.

What specific gifts, great and small, did God give me? When and how did I smile back at God? What gifts was I able to give back to the Lord as thank offerings and contributions to the Capital of Grace?

Next, we ought to review the day with childlike contrition—paying attention to our emotions.

When did my conscience reproach me with the awareness that I have not behaved as I should? When did I fall short in responding to God's call? Have I caused anyone sorrow?

Do I owe anyone an apology or extra love tomorrow to make up for what I was lacking today?

In closing, we might pause to savor some memory of the day by lingering in thought over it for a minute or two allowing a prayer to rise up from our heart out of the experience, and finally, we should look forward to the next day asking God to be with us, to strengthen us, to use us, to keep us from fear and to fill us with the gifts and graces we will need for that day's challenges.



Friends of Schoenstatt of Indiana enjoy coffee and conversation prior to talk.



Five of the eight (soon to be nine) McGinnis children help themselves to some delicious snacks provided by the organizers.

For those who care to go a little deeper into self-knowledge, a natural offshoot of the daily Examen prayer is something Sister Ann called the Particular Examen.

A Particular Examen can be defined as "Regular prayerful examination of one's conscience by concentrating on some **particular** moral failing to be overcome or virtue to be exercised. Its focus is on such **external manifestations of the fault or virtue** as can be remembered for periodic inventory. Particular examens are changed weekly, monthly or otherwise to ensure maximum attention" (Dan Burke).

To learn more about "Examining our Lives in the Light of Mary", feel free to email Eileen Thompson at eileen.indiana@gmail.com, and she will be happy to email a copy of Sister Ann's outline to you.

If you are interested in learning more about the Schoenstatt Movement, please join us at Saint Thomas Aquinas Church in West Lafayette the third Tuesday of every month at 7 pm for the Schoenstatt Monthly Holy Hour of Adoration with a reflection designed to deepen our understanding of Mary's role in bringing us closer to her divine Son delivered by Father Cassian Sama. Or, you may email Suzanne Gardiner, President of Board of Directors at suzannemarieg@gmail.com.