

Tax prep as Ignatian practice

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When I was doing my taxes this year, it occurred to me that the process is a bit like praying the [prayer of examen](#). This Ignatian prayer is used at the end of the day to think back on what happened that day, to ponder where God was in it and to think ahead to the next day. In doing my taxes, I was forced to think back on the events of my life in 2011, both the good and the bad.

While the daily examen leads to prayer, a financial review of a whole year can lead to cursing. But going over my finances for 2011 brought pleasant memories along with the unpleasant and bittersweet ones. I felt gratitude for the good fortune of discovering a doctor who was able to do a delicate but minimally invasive surgical procedure on me. He spared me having to go through major surgery with a prolonged and painful recovery period.

I thought too of the deterioration of my mother's health last year, including the loss of some of her memory and even an unexpected shift in her personality. While she might not yet be ready to claim death as her friend, I was reminded of this notion of Henri Nouwen's: I hope that she can make peace with death before it comes, to even welcome it as friend.

Many of my pleasant thoughts involved travels. The year was unusual in that it took me on separate trips to three coasts. The expansive and relentless motion of oceans and the shifting of sand cause me to go inward and to think deeply about life. I reflect on the times past and anticipate the time when I'll no longer be present to this world.

Family get-togethers also surfaced in my memory. Why do some of the best and worst of times involve our families--the ones we come from as well as the ones we bring into this world?

Using the examen prayer as a template for thinking about taxes gave me a different perspective on that dreaded task and deadline. I had to think about where God was in my life last year--or, better still, where I was in relation to God. As with the

examen prayer, I thought too about the rest of this year. I wondered what experiences will enter my reflections next year.