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“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8).

Isa 55:10-11; Matt 6:7-15

The Our Father is not so much a formula as it is an invitation into Jesus’ own relationship with God. Once we enter that intimate place, we realize that we don’t need a lot of words — to babble like the pagans – because God already knows what we need. Yet, the two-part structure of the prayer is important, for it locates us in the Great Commandment, the perfect stance of all Jewish prayer, the *Sh’ma*: the love of God and of neighbor.

First, we acknowledge God as our *Abba*, the one and eternal Being from which all reality flows. As God’s children we bear the divine name and likeness, the family resemblance, and our lives are about listening to God’s word, in tune with God’s will. Jesus was revealing his own inner life, rooted in the *Sh’ma*: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one, there is no other. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your strength” (Deut 6:4).

The second half of the prayer is about love of neighbor. Because God will provide everything for us, from daily bread to forgiveness, we must in turn share our bread with other and forgive them. This is God’s *Shalom*, the inner and outer peace that guides us through the temptations of life and protects us from evil. Everything is gift. We are already saved. Life is not an arduous climb to God, for we already possess that blessed assurance that enables us to live fully and generously, giving to others what has already been poured into us, limitless mercy and grace, the life of God.

The Prophet Isaiah confirms this guarantee of God's effective presence and purpose at work in us. He compares God's word to the cycles of rain that water the earth and the seeds it holds that germinate and bear fruit. "So shall my word ... not return to me void, but it shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). Because God already knows what we need, even our prayers are inspired. We pray because God is signaling us to open our hearts in readiness to receive what is coming. What we long for is what God is preparing to give us.

We began Lent with Jesus instructing us to pray in secret, where God sees us in secret. This hidden intimacy is the heart of the Our Father, home base for who we already are in relationship to God. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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