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“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matt 6:7).

Sirach 48:1-14; Matt 6:7-15

The renowned Psychiatrist Dr Karl Menninger is said to have devoted his deathbed reflection to the “Our Father” prayer of Jesus. Menninger, who died in 1990 at age 96, explored many religious concepts in his writings on mental health, seeing the role of love, hate and sin as crucial to helping patients understand and regain their inner balance and well-being.

The Our Father is not only a short summary of Jesus’ teaching, it also reveals the personal relationship in which he grounded himself and his public identity. When his disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he invited them into that relationship as the source of everything they would ever pray for or need. To know God as their *Abba*, intimate and loving Father, would center them in the eternal Stillpoint and Source of Creation and reveal them as God’s own children.

The seven petitions in the Our Father place God foremost in our search for meaning. Keeping God’s name holy, accepting his will and reign brings heaven to earth. Daily bread sustains us and forgiveness, when received and given, liberate us to live fully, face temptation avoid evil. The Our Father covers the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor, which is the heart of Torah, the entire Law.

Jesus' focus on a relationship instead of a formula for right living is evident in his statement before the prayer that "your Father knows what you need before you ask him." This is beautifully illustrated in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The father knows his son, anticipates his need to head out on his own, does not lecture him before he departs to learn life the hard way, and he does not humiliate him when he returns home destitute and broken. In fact, the father never ceases to love his wayward son and, even in his misery in a faraway land, he is seeing him and calling him home.

This is what Jesus extends to his disciples and to us in sharing his own intimacy with his Abba. Nothing we may ever want or need in prayer can compare with the love relationship that always sees us and know us as we find our way through life and ultimately home to God. The only thing that can impede our growth is if we refuse to extend this same love to one another. The older brother in the story refused to forgive his prodigal brother and in doing so he turned his back on his loving father.

We may imagine the welcome Karl Menninger received when he passed from this world into the company of saints in the presence of the Beloved Community of Father, Son and Spirit. No doubt, his final prayer was answered.

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