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June 16, 2021

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“Your *Abba* knows your needs even before you ask” (Matthew 6:8).

*2 Cor 11:1-11; Matt 6:7-15*

Today’s Gospel follows on Jesus’ instructions to pray in your secret place, where God sees you and rewards you. The inner self is reserved for our most intimate thoughts, where the chatter, masks and posturing stop and we face the deepest questions about who we are, why we exist at all. God is the source of our existence, the One who called us into being, affirmed us as a reflection of the divine image. God is the sacred source of our secret self.

So, Jesus tells his disciples to address God as *Abba*, “father,” because in that prescientific time the male was thought to be the source of the child, planted like a seed in the womb of the mother. But he could have said God was their *Mama*, or the result of both genders united in love. The nuptial covenant was the highest expression of God’s relationship with Israel. In any case, we go to our secret place to hear again that our deepest identity is that we are loved.

When Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, he is not just offering them the words of a prayer. He is inviting them into his own intimate love relationship with his *Abba*. The “Our Father” might be seen as a version of the *Sh’ma*, the Great Commandment. It first focuses on love of God and secondly on love of neighbor, the vicissitudes of daily life with one another, especially the need for forgiveness.

To stop loving our brothers and sisters is to block the sure flow of love from God. The short petitions in the prayer align and realign us in relationship with God and one another. If we stay in love with God and one another, our needs will be met.

St. Paul sought to instill this same secret in his disciples in Corinth. Love is the most important thing. As they turned away from him to charlatans and other charismatic leaders, so-called “superapostles” who were competing for their loyalty, Paul reminds them that he has never ceased to love them. This is what makes his preaching and leadership authentic.

If we listen to Pope Francis, the primacy of love is clearly the core of his leadership. He continues to try to guide the church through one crisis after another not by taking sides or giving in to the despair many express over the state of the church, but by finding the love that compels the Gospel forward in a sinful church and world. This is the source of support he finds by going to his secret place what God

sees and answers every prayer.

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