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SPEAKS

THROUGH  
ART

Using pictures to help us pray with the Word of God

## THE HEALING OF THE MAN BORN BLIND, RAMSAY, 1840



### Read

Gaze at this picture : See the crowds pressing round Jesus, eager to see him work a miracle, his Apostles watching on the right , the curious onlookers on the left. Jesus and the blind man dominate the scene: Jesus, his hand raised in authority and power, the blind, nameless man, arms outstretched in pleading and anguish.

For Jesus, only *this* man mattered; *this* man needed him ; *this* man wanted to see.

Who is the woman supporting the blind man - his mother? his wife?

There are several incidents in the Bible of Jesus healing a blind man. Does this suggest more than physical blindness?

### Reflect:

Ponder on the mystery here. The role of Mary and Joseph as parents of Jesus is ending ; he is about to take up his destiny as Saviour of the World, which means sacrifice. Mary and Joseph are sacrificing their son and Jesus is offering himself in sacrifice to his Father for all mankind. All three have a sad, far-away expression which confirms this.

Think of our own lives: children leave home and forge their own paths and parents must learn to give way, though inevitably there is sadness in this. Their main work is done but no-one knows the future. Mary had to face the death of Joseph and eventually would follow her son to the cross. She would stand there as he died and hold the dead body of her son in her arms – the ultimate sorrow for any mother.

### Respond in prayer:

- + Pray to Mary and Joseph for all parents as they bring up their children.
- + Pray for wisdom to know when to step back and when and how to support adolescents as they search for their identity.
- + Pray for healthy family life which is so much under attack today.

### Rest:

Trust in God who chose Mary and Joseph for the care and upbringing of his son Jesus. Entrust our children and grandchildren to his love, trusting that he knows best and leave our families in his care, Remain in peace.

### Return:

We all belong to a family; resolve to be a good, caring family member.

## ICON: THE HOLY FAMILY



### Read:

This is an unusual icon of the Holy Family showing Christ as a teenager (adapted from one by Aidan Hart). They are seated at a table reminiscent of the Last Supper or maybe just an ordinary Passover meal that every Jewish family would have. However, on the table, are not the usual foods of the Passover feast but just the cup or chalice containing wine. The symbolism is clear: this is a foretaste of the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood, of the Eucharist.

Notice the colours: Jesus in white, symbolising priesthood or divinity; Mary in tunic of blue for spirituality, and a cloak of blood red for humanity or compassion, as if she were wrapping humanity in her arms; Joseph in a blue tunic for spirituality and a green cloak a sign of fertility and new growth.

Mary and Joseph point to Jesus as if to acknowledge the Son of God though Joseph keeps one protective arm round his shoulder.

The three stars on Mary's veil and cloak (one hidden) are symbolic of her virginity, before, during, and after the birth of her son.

### Reflect:

Blindness! Imagine life without sight. What could be the worst aspect for you? Insecurity? Dependence on others? Inability to enjoy nature, to read, to have any visual imagination?

What would it be like to see for the first time? Imagine the vivid colours, the beauty, the little things like a child's smile; the expression on someone's face; the face of a loved one.

Besides physical blindness, there are other kinds, eg prejudice of any kind, jealousy, envy, hatred. And there is spiritual or moral blindness – not seeing good in others, not appreciating God's gifts, selfishness, not seeing others' needs, being unaware of God's will and action in our lives.

There is **sight** and there is **insight**. We need both.

### Response:

Repeat slowly the prayer of the blind man **Lord that I may see** and specify what you want to see or understand.

*Lord, that I may see your hand at work in my life;*

*Lord that I may see and appreciate the beauty of your creation;*

*Lord give me insight to understand your ways.*

Pray for those who are physically blind, emotionally blind and spiritually blind.

### Rest:

In tranquillity in the gaze of Christ loving you. Exchange this gaze of love without words, without physical sight, in perfect trust..

### Return:

with fresh eyes and fresh appreciation of the little things of life.

## THE HOLY FAMILY - RHODEAN 1843



### Read:

Gaze at this scene of the Holy Family. It shows us the visit of the three magi bringing their gifts to the infant Christ. The old wise man in the foreground has laid his crown as well as his gift of gold at the feet of the holy child; the second 'king' is wearing a crown of light and bearing his gift of frankincense and the third is standing with his gift of myrrh. We know these gifts are symbolic: gold for a king, frankincense for deity and myrrh for suffering. These strange visitors from the East symbolise the coming of all people to the feet of Christ. Mary is serene in witnessing this remarkable visit and Jesus is raising his right hand in blessing. Joseph is standing apart on Mary's left, his arm resting on a ledge, probably lost in thought and wonder.

Look at the other people in the picture – ordinary people: women with a simple gift of fruit, travellers and children. Notice the lamb in the foreground. Does this suggest these poor people are shepherds or is it symbolic of Jesus the lamb of God who would give his life for all – rich and poor? The shaft of light resting on Mary may be the star, or may denote the blessing of God and the presence of the Spirit.

### Reflect:

Where do I belong in this picture? The magi were great scholars searching for the truth which had brought them to the feet of this child. How earnest is my search for the things of God? What gifts have I to bring?

This scene illustrates the mystery we call the Epiphany, which means Revelation – God revealing himself through this child to the gentile nations. How strong is my faith to recognise Christ under many guises? How serious am I in sharing the Good News of God's love with those who have no faith but are searching? Would I take my place beside Mary or hide in the shadows with Joseph and the others? What do you think was going through Joseph's mind?

### Respond:

Pray the first verse of this hymn for the Epiphany:

As with gladness men of old  
Did the guiding star behold  
As with joy they hailed its light  
Leading onward beaming bright  
So, most gracious God may we  
Evermore be led to thee.

Repeat the last two lines several times.

### Rest:

Mary pondered all these things in her heart. She didn't understand but she remained in peace because of her faith. Remain in peace with Mary, accepting all that God sends. The Word was made flesh for us. We are eternally grateful.

### Return:

Resolve to give one gift today to the infant Christ. What will it be – your heart? Look for an opportunity today to share your faith with others