

ישוע בן דוד מלך ישראל  
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— LENTEN PROGRAM 2017 —

# H O P E

MR SHANE DWYER · SR HILDA SCOTT OSB · FR GRAHAM SCHMITZER PP



The season of Lent is really a time of retreat for the whole Church. In offering and commending this Lenten Program for group or individual reflection, it is my prayer that participants will take to heart what it means to be saved, redeemed, forgiven and graced by the Holy Spirit, because God in his mercy sent his Son Jesus to be our Saviour and Redeemer.

*"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind but now I see."*

John Newton (1725–1807)

Have a blessed Lent,

+ Peter Ingham



**Most Rev Peter W Ingham DD**  
Bishop of Wollongong



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
**WOLLONGONG**

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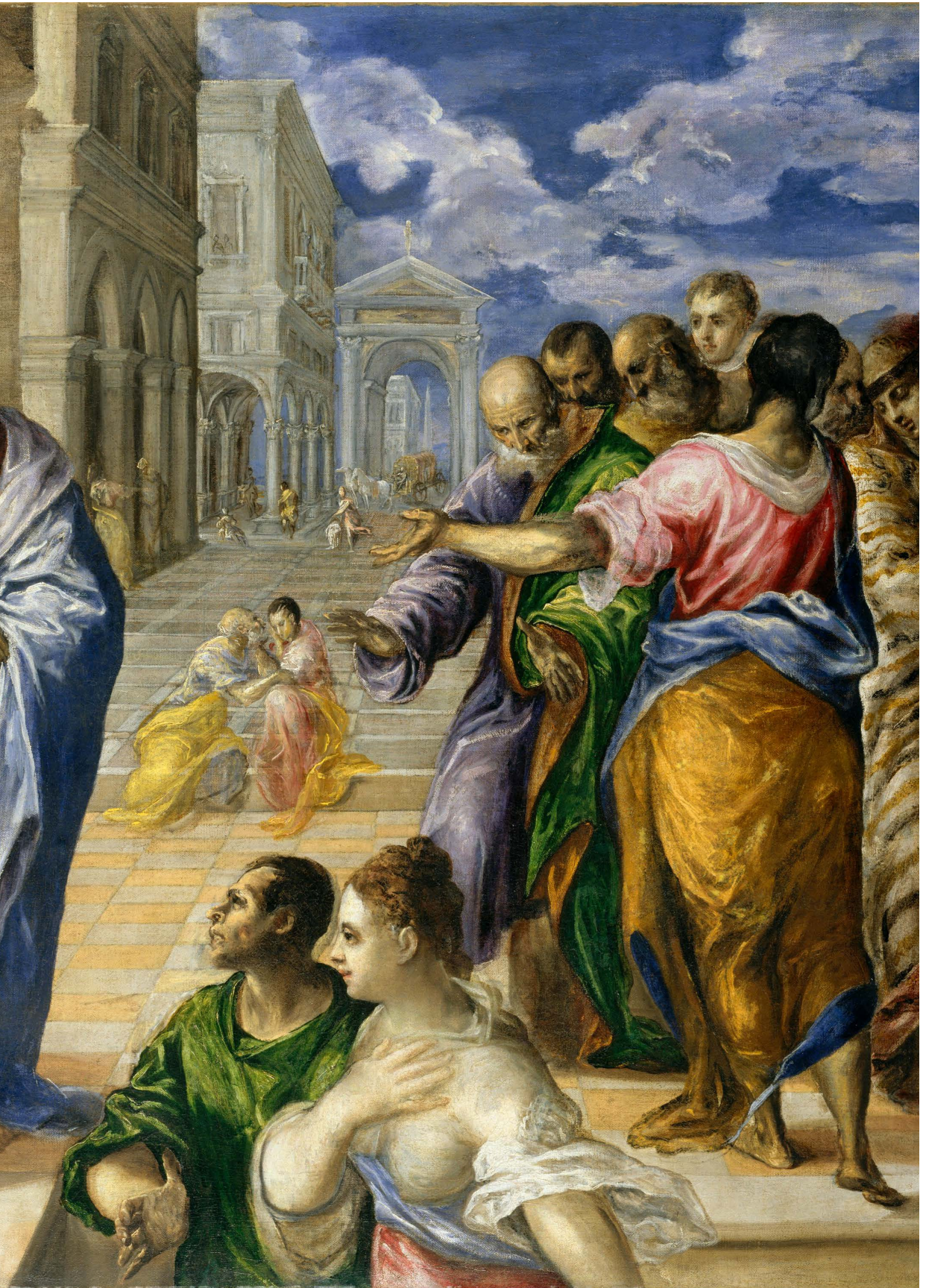


FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

# Healing the Blind Man









# ARTWORK SPOTLIGHT

Fr Graham Schmitzer PP

## *Healing of the Blind at Birth*

El Greco, born Domenikos Theotokopoulos  
(1541–1614)

Between 1572 and 1576. Oil on canvas, 50 × 61 cm.  
Parma, Galleria Nazionale.

**S**t John is the master of the double entendre. The Gospels are not “stories” in the usual sense. They are a proclamation of the living Christ who becomes present to the reader. And so, in giving us this account of the healing of the man who had been blind since birth, St John must actually be telling us something else. He is telling us of the need for spiritual sight. Who heals the blind man? The One who claimed he is the Light of the world.

We have all experienced occasions when, having had some “mystery” explained to us, we exclaim, “Oh yes, I can see now!” John Newton wrote one of the best known hymns in the English world, *Amazing Grace*, with its famous line, “I once was blind but now I see.” Few know how that came about. John had been, since his earliest years, a sailor dealing in slave trading, and a very coarse man. On 21 March 1748, he was caught in a raging storm. Lashing himself to the helm, he recalled his mother’s Christian faith, and called out to God. “On that day the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep water,” he later wrote. At the age of thirty-nine, he became a minister, famous for his hymn-writing.

The catechumens are approaching the Easter Vigil with its great celebration of light. Rising from the waters of the font, they will be given a lighted-candle, a sign that Christ will scatter the darkness of their lives. The Church will pray that they see with new eyes.

Domenikos Theotokopoulos, whom we know as El Greco (“the Greek”), painted the masterpiece chosen for this week, either in Venice or in Rome where he worked after

leaving Crete in 1567 and before moving to Spain in 1576. It was only in 1958 that this painting was recognised as the work of El Greco. It had previously been thought the work of Tintoretto or Veronese. The painting is considered to be unfinished.

El Greco’s interpretation of the miracle actually represents a synthesis of the three Gospel accounts of it. As Christ leaves the temple, he encounters two blind men and restores their sight by touching their eyes. One is shown from the back, gesturing upwards in excitement, while the other kneels before Christ who anoints his eye. The man has reached out to touch the One he cannot yet see, while Christ’s face is a picture of utter compassion. Behind the man is a friend preparing to help the blind man to his feet. In our journey to Christ, we all need the help of others. The two figures in the foreground may well be the blind man’s parents.

But, objecting to the whole episode is a group of neighbours and Pharisees. Jesus has healed on the Sabbath! Religion, sadly, has always included people who have their own ideas about what God can and cannot do. They have God neatly parcelled out. He must abide by their rules! Mind you, we all fall into this trap sometimes. We are happy to obey God until he disturbs our comfort zone.

In this Gospel episode, St John stresses the need of those who have found Christ, to witness to him. The blind man who had been cured is forced to answer his inquisitors, and in doing so, his faith is actually strengthened. At first, he calls Jesus “the man”, then refers to him as a “prophet”, then finally acknowledges him as “Lord”. Our faith is strengthened by being questioned. ♦

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### Opening Prayer

Leader: Let us pause and call to mind God's presence within and among us, today and always.

*Brief pause.*

**All: Lord God, in your surpassing wisdom you reconcile man to yourself through your Word. Grant that your Christian people may come with eager faith and ready will to celebrate the Easter festival. We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*(Taken from the Divine Office)*

### Responsorial Psalm

☉2 ☉7 or 8

*Psalm 22:1-6*

**R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

The Lord is my shepherd;  
there is nothing I shall want.  
Fresh and green are the pastures  
where he gives me repose.  
Near restful waters he leads me,  
to revive my drooping spirit. **R.**

He guides me along the right path;  
he is true to his name.  
If I should walk in the valley of darkness  
no evil would I fear.  
You are there with your crook and your staff;  
with these you give me comfort. **R.**

You have prepared a banquet for me  
in the sight of my foes.  
My head you have anointed with oil;  
my cup is overflowing. **R.**

Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me  
all the days of my life.  
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell  
for ever and ever. **R.**

### First Reading

☉2 ☉9

*1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13*

The Lord said to Samuel, "Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen myself a king among his sons." When Samuel arrived, he caught sight of Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands there before him," but the Lord said to Samuel, "Take no notice of his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him: God does not see as man sees: man looks at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart." Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." He then asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" He answered, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he comes." Jesse had him sent for, a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing. The Lord said, "Come, anoint him, for this is the one." At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

The Word of the Lord.

*Pause for silent reflection.*



## Gospel

2 10

*John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38*

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (a name that means "sent"). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is the same one." Others said, "No, he only looks like him." The man himself said, "I am the man."

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see." Then some of the Pharisees said, "This man cannot

be from God: he does not keep the sabbath." Others said, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" "He is a prophet" replied the man.

"Are you trying to teach us," they replied "and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!" And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Sir," the man replied "tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe", and worshipped him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

*Pause for silent reflection.*



## *To See and Hear*

Mr Shane Dwyer

I learned long ago: be wary of those who think they have got God worked out. After all, what is a religious extremist if not someone who believes they have cornered the market on who God is and what God wants? They believe this justifies whatever they decide to inflict on those around them. Yes, there are things we can say about God, but that is always done in humility. We need to be open to the fact that there is more to know if we are to come to a true understanding of God.

Just consider the evolving understanding of God as presented in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is, among many other things, about the forging of a people. The God of mercy is at work, but at times obscured by the displacement and foment experienced as a nation is formed. Wars, exiles, political intrigue and natural disasters are all present in the pages of the Old Testament. Bringing a people together takes strength, discipline and law. Leaders arose who were strong and able to forge this unruly band of nomads into God's people. Samuel and King David were among them.

But the old dispensation was just a preparation for the new. No more does God use only specially chosen leaders. Each of us is a son or a daughter of God. We are called to be priests, prophets and kings, each according to our vocation. As a priest, you stand in God's presence and pray for the world. Your prayer is heard. As a prophet, you are to proclaim God's Word to the world through everything you are, through everything you do, and through everything you say. As a king (or queen), you have an innate dignity in God's eyes, and you have the authority to offer leadership in the world and in the Church.

You are to proclaim the presence of Christ with your life.

Central to the rejection that Jesus ultimately endured was the relentless way in which he challenged the contemporary wisdom on who God is, what God wants, and how God works. In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus does not agree with the Jewish leaders' perception of how God works. In their understanding, suffering is a sign that the person has been rejected by God. By teaching that God in fact loves the sufferer, Jesus undermines a central element of the way they view God and understand their relationship with God. He is also telling them that they are not in control. For just as they were convinced that suffering is a sign of sin and thus of rejection by God, they were sure that if they did the "right thing" God would give them all the good things in life: health, wealth and every form of happiness. They believed that each of us simply chooses which we want: suffering or happiness. In their view, we are in control of which we receive. They were blind and deaf.

All of us can lose sight of God and fail to hear God's voice. Jesus wishes to heal our inability to see and hear correctly. In this lifetime, the moment will never come when we can say that we see perfectly and that we hear and understand with no distortion. A life of on-going conversion is at the heart of an authentic Christian spiritual life. The moment we think we have "arrived" is the moment we stand once more revealed as blind and deaf. This is why humility is so intimately associated with the great saints. In comparison to us, they achieve great holiness. However, because they can more accurately see and hear, they understand there is so much further to go and more to learn. This keeps them humble.

Asking to see and to hear is all very well in theory. In reality, it opens you to hearing and seeing that your faith must radically deepen and your life fundamentally change. It is little wonder that Jesus' message was so completely rejected by so many who saw and heard him. ♦

*See page 35 for reflection questions.*

# The Light of Jesus

Sr Hilda Scott OSB

If we are honest, we can all admit that we have been blind at one time in our life. Blindness of course is not just physical. It has many layers and no matter how it happens, blindness is blindness. We don't know why the man in today's Gospel was blind, we just know that through an encounter with Jesus sight was given to him and he claimed it. "I only know that I was blind and now I can see."

I once talked with a man named Hugh. He would have been in his sixties when I met him, always polite, yet there was a reserve there, a sense of something hidden, always a part of him that would never engage. He was a keen gardener and conversation usually centred on whatever was in season at the time. One day, our conversation turned to children. I saw something change in Hugh's face, and with tears, out came the story of his second daughter, Lisa, who had been adopted. As a toddler, Lisa had some sort of leg disorder which meant she had to sleep with braces on her legs. She detested it. She cried every night when Hugh put her to bed. Every few months he had to drive with Lisa from their home in the country, to Sydney, in order to see the specialist for further treatment. Hugh went out of his way to make it a fun trip. The pair sang Lisa's favourite songs all the way. On the day that she no longer needed the braces, Hugh took her out and bought her a little pair of red shoes, just what she wanted!

Around the time of Lisa's fourth birthday, Hugh had been gardening and noticed the back wooden fence was unsteady. Rather than pull it down, he decided to prop it up. After all, if it fell it could mean that his prize lawn might die off! The birthday came and Lisa, super excited because of the coming party with her little friends, went out to play in the backyard. Using the fence prop, she began to ride her imaginary horse with such vigour

that the paling fence came crashing down on her. She was killed instantly. Hugh had gone into town, and when he came back, he was greeted by an ambulance, a frightened seven-year-old son and a frantic wife. A fence of guilt came crushing in on him, if only he had fixed that fence ... if only ... if only. On that day, it could be truly said that Hugh became blind.

He shut down; left his wife to handle everything; didn't even go with her to the inquest, and so began his life of hiddenness. He wouldn't talk about Lisa. They moved house but it really only changed the scenery and made it easier for Hugh to stay "blind". Years rolled by, and now here he was sitting in front of me breaking his heart, telling a story that had waited so long to be told. In the multitude of tears, the scales fell from his heart, and he *saw*, as for the first time, the wife who had loved him throughout it all. He *saw* what he had done to her; he *saw* the half-life he had lived; he *saw* the wasted opportunities; he *saw* himself. Furthermore, this sight was so complete that something moved in his heart, and he began to *see* his little girl again. He even went looking for the little red shoes. As I write, Hugh is in heaven, the first of the family to hug Lisa again and no doubt very glad that I am telling you the story. He never ceased to tell the story himself.

It's simple enough really: "blindness" isn't a life sentence to live in the dark or the muted-grey forever. Rather, it is an opportunity for encounter with the "Light" of Jesus in whatever way he comes to you. All you have to do is put yourself in the path of Jesus and he will do the rest. You are already doing that in reading this reflection. ♦

*See page 35 for reflection questions.*



## Shane's Reflection Questions

1. We are reminded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (783–786) that we are all called to be priests, prophets and kings. We need to pray for the world, proclaim God's Word, and provide leadership in our Church and our world. Which aspect of this threefold calling do you find easiest to live in your own life? How can you improve on the other two aspects?
2. A life of on-going conversion is at the heart of an authentic Christian spiritual life. How do you ensure that you are living a life of on-going conversion?
3. In order to come to a true understanding of God, we need to always be open. What changes do you need to make to be able to see and hear God clearly in your life?

## Hilda's Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever experienced blindness in the lives of other people? What impact did it have on you?
2. How can you put yourself and the world in the path of Jesus to encounter his "Light"?

## For the Week Ahead

One of the best prayers we can pray is simply to ask God to so change our hearts that we *see* him. This week, use the ancient Jesus Prayer as a mantra: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner." Say it again and again and you will see your blindness and you will see him. Make a note of what you have seen.

## Closing Prayer and Intercessions

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, heal our inability to see and hear correctly and grant us the humility to understand that we have so much further to go and so much more to learn in order to radically deepen our faith and change our life. We ask this in your name.

**All: Amen.**

*Brief pause*

Leader: Let us glorify God for his wealth of goodness and pray to him through Jesus Christ, who is always living to intercede for us.

**All: Inflamm our hearts with your love.**

Leader: God of mercy, help us to enrich this day with deeds of kindness; let men know by our actions that we are all one family.

**All: Inflamm our hearts with your love.**

Leader: At the time of the flood you saved Noah through the ark; grant salvation through water to those preparing for baptism.

**All: Inflamm our hearts with your love.**

Leader: May we never live by bread alone; give us life by every word you speak.

**All: Inflamm our hearts with your love.**

Leader: Help us to avoid all anger and dissension; let us find joy in your peace and love.

**All: Inflamm our hearts with your love.**

*(Taken from the Morning Prayer)*