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THE  
GOD  
WHO  
SPEAKS

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THE  
GOD  
WHO  
SPEAKS

THROUGH  
ART

Using pictures to help us pray with the Word of God

# JACOB AND HIS 12 SONS BY ZURBARAN 1640s



## Read:

Gaze at the portraits of Jacob and his twelve sons.

Jacob was the son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham and heir to the promise God made to Abraham. His sons were the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob the patriarch appears in an olive coloured turban and simple red tunic, hunching over his cane. His sons in contrast, fill the 6 ft frames and wear a startling variety of fabrics. On his deathbed, Jacob had bestowed on each a blessing which foretold their destinies (*Genesis 49*) reflected in their clothing and poses. Sadly, ten of the tribes were wiped out by the Assyrians from the North, leaving only Judah and Joseph in the south.

It was thought that the indigenous people of the New World were the descendants of the lost tribes and that Zurbaran painted these portraits for a wealthy client in Latin America. In 1756, they were bought (except for Benjamin) by the then Bishop of Durham, Bishop Trevor, a supporter of Jewish rights in England, and he hung them in the dining room of Auckland Castle where they have remained.

## Reflect:

Moses was 40 years old when God called him to undertake his life's great work. Do I know what God wants of me?

As St John Henry Newman wrote, "God has created me to do some definite service. He has committed some work to me that he has not committed to another. I have my mission that no one else can do..."

Moses was content with a quiet life. To go to Pharaoh and demand the freedom of the Hebrews was too big for him, hence all the excuses which God dismissed one by one. This marks the beginning of Moses' greatness; he became the leader and liberator of his people and the friend of **God** who spoke with him "face to face", the one to whom God gave the Law and 10 Commandments

- + What excuses have I for settling into my comfort zone? Too old? Too busy? Beyond my capabilities?
- + What do you think God meant by asking Moses to remove his shoes? Am I aware of 'holy ground' in my life?.
- + God needs our co-operation in working out his plan. Do I ever ask what has God in mind for me? Do I let God work through me?

## Respond with St Ignatius' prayer:

*Dearest Lord,  
teach me to be generous;  
teach me to serve You as You deserve;  
to give and not to count the cost,  
to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labour and not to ask for reward  
save that of knowing that I do your holy will.*

## Rest:

In the knowledge that God will work through us if we surrender our wills to him, repeat several times:

Trust      Surrender      Believe      Receive  
until we reach a place of quiet abandonment.

## Return:

Resolve to see everything whatever happens today as God's will for you.

## ICON: MOSES BEFORE THE BURNING BUSH



### Read:

Moses has had to flee from Egypt for murdering an Egyptian. He fled to Midian where he married Peninah, a Midianite. Here, we see Moses tending the sheep of his father-in-law when he is alerted to a bush that was burning but not consumed. When he explored the bush, a voice (God) told him to take off his shoes for he was on holy ground.

We see Moses removing his sandals. There followed the conversation between God and Moses where God called him to go back to Egypt and lead his people to freedom. Read the account in Exodus Ch. 3 and note all the excuses Moses gave for avoiding this commission.



**Judah**, (left) ancestor of the Kings David and Solomon wears regal attire and is shown with a lion and sceptre (Lion and ruler of the House of Judah).



**Joseph**, (right) who had been sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers only to rise to a position of great prominence, is shown holding a document that shows his importance as adviser to the Pharaoh and wears richly ornamented clothes as befits his status.



**Benjamin**, (left) accompanied by a wolf on a leash, looks back over his shoulder with a teenager's swagger, his lips pursed, his elbow thrust jauntily to the right. Look at this confident unbothered youngster and then return to his father...



**Jacob**, (right) was a trickster in his youth. He wears the same reds and greens as his last child but now he is old and bent towards earth. Surely this is a portrait of the human condition.

**Reflect:**

Reflect: Jacob was scoundrel, a liar and a cheat who robbed his elder brother Esau of his birthright and then had to flee to his kinsman Laban for his protection. He worked 7 years to marry Rachel whom he loved, only to be tricked into marrying Leah, and then had to work another 7 years for Rachel. Rough justice! But God blessed him because he was heir to the Promise made to Abraham and Isaac and eventually brought him with his sons back to the Promised Land.

Am I aware of God's control and purpose for my life despite my failings and inadequacies?

Joseph, vizier of Egypt, was able to save his father and brothers when famine broke out and they came to Egypt for help. God's ways are not our ways and he writes straight on crooked lines. Can I see this in my life?

Jesus was born of the house of Judah so our supreme good came from a crooked and shifty family. What does this say to me?



**Respond:**

Look prayerfully at your family history and thank God that some good has come from difficult and uncertain times and questionable ancestors. Pray this prayer of acceptance:

Whatever has been: Yes

Whatever is to come: Yes

Pray for your children and grandchildren that God will always be with them especially in rocky times.

**Rest:**

In the knowledge that God holds us in the palm of his hand and will enable some good to come from all our mistakes and bad decisions.

**Return:**

With a thoughtful heart to our daily life and resolve to see God's hand in everything.