

# Art - looking at pictures for Holy Week

Here is the first brief look at a picture:

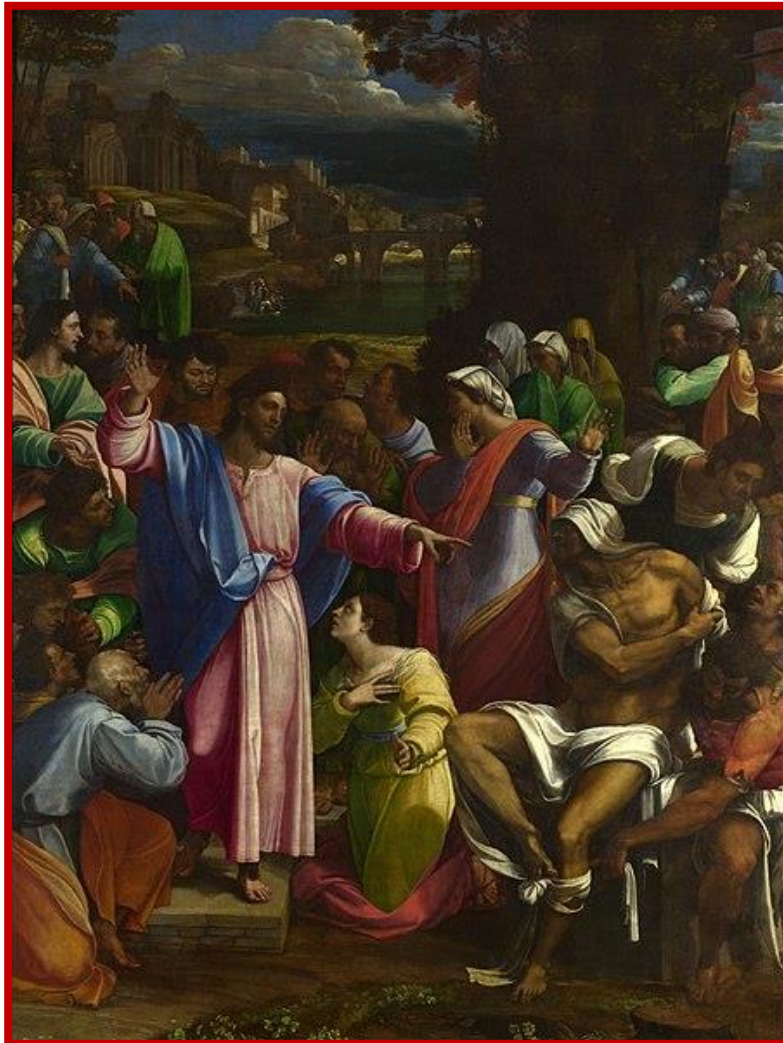
## “The Raising of Lazarus” by Sebastiano di Piombo

This huge picture was painted in 1517 for Cardinal Giulio de Medici, who later became Pope Clement VII. It was among the first paintings acquired by the new National Gallery in 1824 and is no 1 in the whole collection.

Sebastiano was a Venetian painting originally, although he was working in Rome at the time. He used oils and the Venetian ‘colorito’ technique, which relied on the use of striking colours to create the design.

Jesus’ figure stands out, not only because of its colour but also because of its positioning on third across the picture and his striking pose, his right hand held up in blessing and his left towards Lazarus, taking the eye across the centre of the picture. By contrast, Lazarus is almost monochrome, his skin tone different to the rest of group and his winding sheet starkly white. He occupies the right third of the picture and stares at Jesus with a gaze that is both intense and also full, it seems of the horrors of what death was before the resurrection of Christ. Sebastiano was a friend of Michelangelo at the time he painted this picture and the figure of Lazarus was drawn by him as one can see in the musculature and pose.

The other figures slot in round these two central characters. St Peter kneels on Jesus’ right,



recognisable because of the renaissance tradition of showing him with a grey beard and in an orange cloak. To Jesus’ left is Mary, kneeling in an attitude of belief that foreshadows her offering of the oil at the last supper.

Martha stands behind Lazarus to Jesus’ left and is holding her cloak in front of her face, while behind her a group of women also hold cloths in front of their noses. This references Martha’s

comment to Jesus that Lazarus would stink due to having been in the tomb for three days. In the background is a group of Pharisees, looking cunning and ready to get rid of Jesus.

Behind Jesus are the other disciples and St John stands out as young and beautiful as he was traditionally portrayed.

Others stand behind, in every stage of belief or unbelief, attracted by the commotion but notice the group of fisherman down by the lake, oblivious to what is happening.

In the background are Roman ruins, representing the overthrow of the old pagan religion, and it is no coincidence that the bridge has three arches. The light strikes the oak leaves, tingeing them with gold, reminding us of the light of the world.