

28<sup>th</sup> August 2025

## Exhibition

**“A crowd is not company, and faces but a gallery of pictures,  
and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.”**

Francis Bacon, *Of Friendship* (1625)

*Pictures at an Exhibition* is piano suite in ten movements written in 1874 by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky. It's a musical depiction of a tour of an exhibition of works by architect and painter Viktor Hartmann at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, following the artist's sudden death the previous year. Mussorgsky uses the music of each movement of his suite to "describe" a painting, or, at least, to introduce the listener to the quality, style and content of the art on display.

We don't need a musician to bring paintings into our home. We have plenty on our walls. But the problem is, we have too many! "We could open our own art gallery," my wife remarked. Who needs Mussorgsky's exhibition when you already have a houseful of paintings? So, we're having to decide what to keep and what to let go, which rooms to hang paintings in and which pictures go together. It'll take a while, with big decisions to be made. Perhaps we'll listen to *Pictures at an Exhibition* while we're making up our minds. We'll take any help we can get.

But we're enjoying talking about it all, of course: where a painting was bought; why we chose this one; who was with us at the time; what significant event did it mark; who the artist is; what we felt like when we bought it. And whatever decisions we make, we'll go on enjoying our gallery, exploring our own "pictures at an exhibition" in our home.

And, as we do, we'll keep Francis Bacon's words in mind. This is not a gallery of random pictures. It's not even about the faces all these paintings bring to mind. It's about the stories of love they tell: of friends and family; of people with us and long since gone; of significant times in our marriage; of faces and names that are now distant memories. The more paintings we look at, the more stories we have about them, the more decisions we make about our gallery, the more love surrounds us.

What are the pictures in *your* gallery? What love do they represent? What brings that love to mind as you wander through the pictures of people, places, memories and events at your exhibition today?

### Prayer for today

*"Faces and places, they all left indelible traces on my soul." (Tom Paxton)*