

## **A Gift carried by the Friends of the Churches of the Middle East A copy of the shroud of Christ in Lebanon**

It is the face of Christ, his crucified body, his wounds, of what many believe. Yesterday, many waited to see him, to look at him face to face, "to steal" a blessing from him, to meet him, to rejoice in him. Humbleness, prayers, hearts whispering silently, incense rising in the church of the Annunciation of the Armenian Catholics in Jeitawi until the late hours of the night in front of the "Shroud of Christ", and specifically in front of an exact copy of it, a gift from the "Friends of the Churches of the East" that a large delegation brought to Lebanon yesterday afternoon, coming from Turin - Italy, to be delivered to the Armenian Catholic Church.

In the middle part of the Church, and in the vicinity of the tabernacle, they put the copy in a glass box surrounded by the believers and the priests. Awe inhabited the place, and the "shroud" captured the attention of all. That was the desire that the Armenian Catholic Patriarch Nerses Bedros XIX achieved. After his visit to the original Shroud in Turin during its presentation last April, he "asked to obtain a copy of the Shroud" as parish priest of the Annunciation Church Father Wartan Kazanjian declared to *annahar*. "They prepared a copy of the shroud, made with cloth, which is certified by the Archbishop of Torino, the pontifical custodian of the Shroud, Cardinal Severino Poletto."

The delegation of the "Friends" carrying the gift copy includes 37 Italians, led by Monsignor Giuseppe Ghiberti. He was met at Rafik Hariri International Airport by Patriarchal Vicar Bishop Jean Terozian, and father Kazanjian. The destination was the Patriarchate in Jeitawi, where the Patriarch was waiting and the crowd of priests and believers. In the church, they put the copy under the eyes of the faithfuls, before hosting the Patriarch Italian visitors in the hall of the Patriarchate.

"Our goal is to carry the face of Christ on the Holy Shroud to the Churches of the East, including the Armenian Church," says Monsignor Ghiberti to *annahar*. He points out that "our action is towards the believers who were not able to go to Turin in Italy to visit the Shroud. We thought of them, especially the poor."

The "Credibility of the Shroud" is something Ghiberti himself believes in. "I do not think there are reasons to preventing the belief that the Shroud is the image of Christ," he says. "What we see on the shroud take us back to the crucifixion of a man as narrated by Evangelicals about the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the similarity is very strong and compelling and extraordinary and influential. We must therefore acknowledge the presence of this sign and it must be demonstrated to the largest possible number of people."

The copy will remain in Lebanon, specifically in the Church of St. Gregory and St. Elias, Debbas Square, Beirut. The site has a strong symbolic meaning, and Ghiberti says: "To be here is very impressive, particularly since it seems that Beirut has regained a normal life, after suffering experienced pain like our Savior."

"The believers' faith grows through the meditation of the picture of the shroud," stresses Father Kazanjian, noting that "the Synod's for the Middle East will soon take place and go to the

Catholics in the East, opening a dialogue with the Orthodox Churches and others and the subject of co-existence with Muslims " .

The program includes:

- Thursday, 30 September: The exact copy remains displayed in the church of the Annunciation till noon.S
- Friday, October 1: The full image of the Shroud is displayed during the solemn prayer at 7:00 pm in the Church of St. Gregory & St. Elias, Debbas Square in Beirut, followed by an art exposition.
- Sunday, October 3: The exact copy will be moved to the Church of Our Lady of Bzommar, where a festive mass will be held at 10:30 am. Then, it shall be returned to St. Gregory & St. Elias church in Beirut, where it will remain always shown.

### **Farés Melki's Report On His Meeting With Msgr. Giuseppe Ghiberti (2 Oct 2010)**

Dear friends

I had a very nice meeting with Msgr. Ghiberti.

After the holy ceremony in the cathedral of St. Elias and St. Gregorius presided by the Armenian Catholic Patriarch Nerses Bedros XIX and filled with the faithful, where the exact copy of the Shroud was exhibited on the altar, Mgr Ghiberti presented, in Italian, the essential facts about the Shroud. The presentation was translated into Arabic, sentence by sentence, by father Rafi, an Armenian priest.

Then the patriarch gave an homily about the meaning of the Shroud and invited the assembly to say a special prayer in Armenian that was printed and distributed. At the end, all the attendees were invited to the salon of the cathedral. It was there, in the salon, where I met Msgr. Ghiberti.

I introduced myself and gave him some flyers about my Arabic site. I transmitted to him the best wishes from those who asked me to do that. Father Rafi translated my words into Italian. Mgr Ghiberti asked if I could speak English or French. I immediately said yes, both of them. Then he continued talking in French, Father Rafi left us and told me that I have only 2 minutes because Mgr Ghiberti should sit near the Patriarch. Our entire conversation took 10 minutes and it seemed to me that he was interested by what we exchanged.

I told him that it is our wish that the pope, Benedict XVI, declares that the Shroud of Turin is the true Shroud of Christ. He said that Benedict XVI believes that and so does he, but it is a matter of science not of faith. Then I asked him if there are any new tests scheduled. He said that he gave Msgr. Bertone a series of tests and he is awaiting his approval. When I asked if those tests contain a new C14 test he answered with ..... No, No, it will come later.

At the end he expressed his joy that he met me and that we can continue our conversation by e-mail. He is staying in Lebanon for a few days only.

I had a good impression of the meeting and will keep in contact with him through e-mail.

Farés Melki