

## **Mysteries of the Shroud**

*The Shroud of Turin represents both Darkness and Light. The shroud is enigmatic; representing both the finalities of life, and faith and hope in eternal life. It is proof of He that is victorious in life over death.*

By Rafael de la Piedra Seminario \*

The pervasiveness of silence is powerful at the end of life. The Holy Shroud; that huge cloth that is found in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in the Italian city of Turin, is, without doubt, a challenge for all humanity. What the shroud so miraculously guards is the great mystery that all humanity must confront: death.

Today, on Palm Sunday, all the Church remembers the messianic entry of Jesus into the City of Peace, Jerusalem. We also associate His entry into Jerusalem with his Passion and Death. In the mass of Palm Sunday, we read the entire Passion story. These events of the Passion and Death of Jesus are meticulously related in all four versions of the Gospel. In addition to the passion story, we have an additional narration, the Holy Shroud.

The central figure of the burial cloth depicts all the characteristics of a man that underwent the passion and death of Jesus Christ; the image on the cloth still a mystery even today. What is main theme of this burial shroud? Without doubt it the death and absence of the God-Man that paid the dear price of his own life so that we might have eternal life. It is the prolonged story of Good Friday that we celebrate during the Easter Vigil.

Before the Shroud of Turin, Pope Benedict XVI has pronounced the exquisite words, “ the hidden nature of God is part of contemporary spirituality, in an existential way, almost unconsciously, like an empty heart that has become even larger. At the end of the XIX century, Nietzsche wrote, “God is dead; and we have killed Him!” This famous expression, if we study it well, comes virtually out of Christian tradition; in the Via Crucis we repeat it frequently often without realizing what we really are saying. After two World Wars, the lagers and gulags, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki; today this saying has been transformed into a Holy Saturday; the darkness of this day asks us to question those great questions of life and to even question our own faith.”

This disconcerting, mysterious, and paradoxical death, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “is the key to the door of joy.” An unanswerable mystery, death demonstrates to us our very limited human condition, but also shows us our true vocation; eternal life.

It is, as Pope Benedict XVI says, a paradox: “it makes me think about the fact that the Holy Shroud is a photograph, with both a positive and a negative image; at the same time it depicts the darkest mystery of mankind and the brightest eternal hope.” The Holy Shroud, the Holy Father continues, speaks of that moment. “It is an exact witness of that unique, unrepeatable moment in the time span of humankind and the universe, in which God through Jesus Christ, shared our experience of death and our permanence in death ... Jesus Christ while dead crossed the threshold of this ultimate solitude while leading us with Him through this very same threshold.” By this deed at the very darkest moment of our ultimate solitude (our death) we may proclaim that we will really not be alone. The victory over Death is the foundation of our faith. Our faith, remembering the victory over death of Jesus Christ, tells us that the tomb is not the ultimate end of our existence. “God calls us to the resurrection and eternal life”, said Blessed John Paul II.

## **The Resurrection**

How do we understand the resurrection of Christ? Before anything, we must understand that we are talking about an occurrence beyond reason. Even Jesus' own followers found it difficult to believe. Pope Benedict XVI, in his book about Jesus, reflected on this great moment in time: not undergoing bodily corruption is precisely the definition of Resurrection. The resurrection specifically implies that Jesus' body did not undergo corruption ... The resurrection relays to us a new reality in time and space and opens to us a new reality beyond ourselves and creates for us a new paradigm. The image on the Shroud, guarded in Turin, tells us exactly this; it bound a resting corpse that did not suffer the pangs of death and putrefication. It shows the luminous and serene face of Him that has witnessed the great victory beyond time and space.

Benedict XVI says: "It appears to me that reflecting on this sacred shroud in the light of faith, the luminosity of the shroud's face may be perceived. The Holy Shroud has been hidden in profound darkness, but at the same time represents Light; and I believe that the thousands that annually venerate the shroud, without counting the masses that venerate the images of the shroud, because they see not only Darkness but Light; not the defeat of life and love; they see victory, the victory of life over death, of love over hatred; of course they see the death of Jesus Christ but they also witness the Resurrection; at the core of his death is Life; and in His Life is Love."

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