

CONTEMPLATING THE SHROUD

Text by Emanuela Marinelli and Father Domenico Repice

Translation by Roberta Marinelli

Review by Father Joseph Spence FFm

Narrators: Father Joseph Spence FFm and Sister Mary Loegering

In this Jubilee we wish to become pilgrims following the example of many who have set out to Contemplate the Shroud, an icon of hope. That burial shroud, the most famous in the world, venerated for centuries and recently analyzed and authenticated, offers us today a great mosaic of knowledge. Let us be awed by this Cloth without a trace of corruption or shadow of putrefaction, in which no fiber was altered by the chemical processes typical of the deterioration of bodies. Although it is loaded with history, science, research, debates, analysis, the Shroud seems to be light.

The writer Giovanni Arpino commented: “A piece of linen. Just a piece of linen. On a planet that is swollen with monuments, pyramids, coliseums, triumphal arches, equestrian statues, temples that are uncontaminated or corroded by mold and abandonment, on this planet only a piece of linen, with that Print, retains its mystery.”

The historical-spiritual journey that is proposed involves pontiffs, bishops, saints, intellectuals and pilgrims, men and women of every era. It aims to be a window that looks out onto the past to try to trace significant elements of this devotion, to listen to them, without being conditioned and in freedom.

It is all due to Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man and an authoritative member of the Jewish Sanhedrin: without him, today we would not have our precious iconic relic to contemplate. It was his courage that allowed an honorary burial of Jesus' body. Having obtained permission from Pilate, Joseph purchased the precious linen, while Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin, procured the spices.

The presence of Mary and John under the cross suggests that they remained on Calvary awaiting the return of the two Sanhedrin and actively participated in the burial operations.

The imminent sunset put an end to the operations and the large stone had to be rolled to close the tomb. A last look at the body laid out in the cloth becomes the first gaze of contemplation of the Shroud, the precious container of that body for only a few hours.

At dawn on the day after the Sabbath, the contemplation of the Shroud becomes richer and more intense. Peter and John, alerted by Mary Magdalene, arrive breathless at the tomb and contemplate the now empty Shroud. The precious linen, witness to the Resurrection, was probably collected by the two apostles.

It is not difficult to imagine that in the first centuries of Christianity, Christ's burial cloth was kept hidden, or at least reserved for a small community, perhaps in the hands of the Nazarene's own family.

Despite the concealment of the first centuries, interest in the Shroud in that period was already notable and this is testified by multiple mentions of it in ancient writings. In addition to the canonical Gospels, some apocryphal texts also speak of Jesus' funeral cloths. Among these are the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles (2nd century), the Gospel according to Peter (2nd century) and the Gospel of Nicodemus (2nd-4th century).

Pope Sylvester I (4th century), already in the period immediately following the end of the persecutions, prescribed that the Mass be celebrated on a white linen, in memory of the one in which the Lord was wrapped.

Severus of Antioch (4th-5th century) in his Homily on the Resurrection writes about the arrival of Peter and John at the tomb: “When they arrived, they saw the clear signs of the Resurrection. In fact, they saw the cloths laid in the tomb: this would not have been possible if the body had been stolen, first of all because thieves love to steal clothes, and then because they commit thefts very quickly so as not to be caught in the act and punished severely. Regarding the body of Jesus, John wrote: They wrapped him in cloths, with perfumes, as the Jews are accustomed to do to prepare for burial. How,

then, could the thieves have easily untied the knots and stripped the body of the cloths, which are glued, are difficult to detach and which tear before being removed (in fact, they were glued with a mixture of aloe and myrrh, which Nicodemus had brought)? And even the sudarium, which was on his head, not laid with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself, showed no sign of confusion, as would have happened if the thieves had taken the body. For where did the thieves find time and safety to roll up the sudarium neatly and put it aside? So, even this detail clearly showed that the Resurrection had really taken place and, at the same time, revealed a divine mystery. Peter and John saw these things and believed, since they had looked not only simply but with a higher and apostolic intelligence. For the tomb was full of light and, even though it was still night, they saw what was inside in two ways, with the senses and with the Spirit.”

Also very interesting is the *Liber Mozarabicus Sacramentorum* (6th-7th century), which says that Peter, with John, runs to the tomb and sees in the linens the recent vestiges of the deceased and resurrected One. The plural “vestigia”, which is already present in the Latin text, has the meaning of traces, imprints.

Braulio, bishop of Saragossa (7th century), writes: “In that [apostolic] time many things could have happened that were not written. Thus, of the burial linens and the sudarium in which the body of the Lord was wrapped, we read that they were found and we do not read that they were preserved. I do not think, however, that the Apostles overlooked to preserve them, that they did not preserve them as relics for future times”.

Maria Elisabetta Patrizi, co-founder in 1976 with Monsignor Giulio Ricci of the Roman Center of Sindonology, considered it plausible that the Shroud was preserved by the Virgin Mary in Ephesus. This city is also mentioned in Islamic sources, according to which a cloth with the image of Christ was transported to Ruhā, which is Edessa, at the beginning of the 7th century AD, after having been preserved in Ephesus, Damascus and Antioch. This sacred relic was the Image of Edessa, considered the Mandīl of Jesus.

The term Mandīl can also indicate a small handkerchief on which only the face of Christ is visible, but this is not an obstacle to the identification of this fabric with the Shroud, since other sources report that the cloth, called Mandylion by the Byzantines, was tetrádiplon (folded four times). The word mandylion (in Latin mantilium, in Aramaic mantila) normally, although not systematically, refers to a relatively large cloth, such as a monk’s cloak or a sort of tablecloth. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this mysterious cloth was the Shroud, folded so as to show only the face. Traces of ancient folds have also been identified on the linen preserved in Turin, which make this identification plausible.

A well-founded tradition attributes to the apostle Judas Thaddeus, a relative of Jesus, the transfer of the cloth with the imprint of Christ to Edessa, to satisfy the desire of the king of the city, Abgar, who was ill and had sent a letter to Jesus asking him to come to him to heal him.

In the *Narratio de Imagine Edessena*, attributed to Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, emperor of Constantinople from 912 to 959, it is Thaddeus who brings the Sacred Image to Abgar. Upon the arrival of the apostle, the sovereign contemplated it, while from it a light “too bright to look at” was released and he was immediately healed of his infirmities.

In 769, Pope Stephen III spoke at the Lateran Synod in favor of the legitimacy of the use of sacred images, referring to the one in Edessa, which he had learned about thanks to the accounts of believers from the Eastern regions. The Sermon also speaks of the glorious image of “the face and the entire body” of Jesus on a cloth. This part of the text, which may be an interpolation, certainly prior to 1130, explains how the impression of Jesus’ body occurred: “He stretched out his whole body on a cloth, white as snow, on which the glorious image of the Lord’s face and the length of his whole body were so divinely transfigured that it was sufficient for those who had not been able to see the Lord in person in the flesh to look at the transfiguration produced on the cloth.”

In 787, at the Second Council of Nicaea, convened to discuss the legitimacy of the veneration of images in reference to the Christological dogma, during the fifth session the Sacred Image of Edessa,

not made by human hands and sent to Abgar, was expressly cited as the main argument in defense of the legitimacy of the use of sacred representations against the adverse theses of the iconomachists.

A valid testimony in favor of the identification of the Image of Edessa with the Shroud is the Codex Vossianus Latinus Q 69, preserved in the Rijksuniversiteit of Leiden (Netherlands). It is a 10th-century manuscript that refers to a Syriac original prior to the 8th century, the period in which it was translated into Latin by the archiater Smira. It states that, in reply to Abgar's letter, Jesus wrote: "If you wish to see my appearance as it is corporally, I send you this sheet on which you will be able to see not only my face depicted, but you will be able to look at the form of my entire body divinely transfigured".

The fame of the precious image made it highly sought after, to the point that Romanos I Lekapenos, Emperor of Byzantium, came into possession of it in 944. The event was commemorated with a liturgical feast on the anniversary, August 16, still celebrated by Orthodox Christians. Some hymns composed for this feast refer to the Image, which was particularly venerated and is attributed with thaumaturgical power.

The prayer of Vespers of the Byzantine liturgy sings a hymn in which the image impressed on the cloth is recognized and venerated as the Image of Jesus Christ.

The identification of the Image of Edessa with the Shroud is supported by the Greek Vatican Codex 511, which dates back to the 10th century. It contains the Oration of Gregory, archdeacon and referendary of Hagia Sophia, the great church of Constantinople, where the Edessa Image is described as a figure not limited to the face alone. In his sermon Gregory states that this Image he is describing was not produced with artificial colors, as it is only "splendor".

The weekly exhibition of the Shroud is asserted in the testimony of the crusader knight Robert de Clari, chronicler of the Fourth Crusade. In his work *La conquête de Constantinople*, he wrote of the wonders that could be seen before the fall of the city (April 12, 1204) to the Latin crusaders: "Among these was a church called St. Mary of the Blachernae, where there was the Shroud (Sydoines) in which Our Lord was wrapped, which every Friday rose up straight, so that it was possible to see the figure of Our Lord well. No one, neither Greek nor French, knew what became of this Shroud when the city was conquered."

The Shroud was probably brought to France by Baron Othon de La Roche and may have later come to the Templars directly through his family. The Templars venerated the image of a man, called Baphomet. On a wooden panel found in Templecombe, England, a bearded face can be seen that unmistakably resembles the Shroud.

In the mid-1300s, the Shroud was in Lirey, France, in the hands of a crusader knight, Geoffroy de Charny, who exhibited it in the church of his fiefdom. His wife was a descendant of Othon de la Roche and it is likely that the Shroud reached Geoffroy through her. Pilgrimages to the church where the Shroud was exhibited at that time are attested by a medallion, found in the Seine [River] in 1855, and by a mold for medallions found in 2009 near Lirey. Geoffroy de Charny's son, Geoffroy II, also continued the exhibitions of the Shroud amidst various difficulties. After his death, his daughter Marguerite continued the exhibitions with a large influx of pilgrims. The noblewoman, widowed and childless, gave the relic to Duke Louis of Savoy in 1453.

In 1455 Jean Germain, bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône, listed the Holy Shroud among the world's most illustrious relics: "There exists in Chambéry, a town in Savoy, the Shroud of the Sepulchre, with the effigy of Christ impressed on it."

Pope Sixtus IV in his treatise *De Sanguine Christi*, published in 1471, wrote: "If we adore the Holy Cross on which Our Lord Jesus Christ was suspended, it seems right and worthy to also venerate and adore the Holy Shroud, in which are clearly seen the traces of Christ's humanity, which the Divinity had united to Himself, that is, the traces of his true blood."

The Savoyes frequently moved and exposed the Shroud to the veneration of the faithful. In 1506 the placement of the Shroud in the Sainte-Chapelle of Chambéry became definitive and thus began the public cult of the relic; in fact, in that year Charles III and his mother Claudine addressed a petition to Pope Julius II to obtain papal approval of the Office and the Mass in honor of the relic. Pope Julius

II set the liturgical anniversary on May 4th, the day after the commemoration of the finding of the Holy Cross, at that time celebrated on May 3rd.

Pope Clement VIII approved this prayer towards the end of the year 1500: “God, who in the Holy Shroud, in which your most sacred body was wrapped by Joseph after being taken down from the cross, have left us the traces of your passion: graciously grant that by virtue of your death and burial we may be raised to the glory of the resurrection”.

Pope Leo X considered the Shroud as an outstanding relic of the passion “without any reservation”.

On the night between December 3rd and 4th, 1532, the reliquary containing the Shroud was caught in a fire that broke out in the Sainte-Chapelle in Chambéry. The Holy Linen was saved, but was badly damaged. Two years later, it was entrusted to the Poor Clares of the Monastery of Sainte-Claire-en-Ville in Chambéry for the necessary repairs, which were carried out by the mother abbess herself, Louise de Vargin, with the help of three nuns. At the end of the restoration work, on May 2nd, 1534, the Holy Linen, rolled up and wrapped in red silk, was returned to the Sainte-Chapelle.

The Poor Clares wrote a report on the operations carried out. In the text, after an account of the preparations for the restoration work, there is a moving description of the two images, frontal and dorsal, with the relative wounds and traces of blood: “All our conversations were with God; we let our gaze run over all the bleeding wounds of his sacred body, whose imprints appeared on this Holy Shroud; it seemed to us that the opening of the sacred side, as the most eloquent of the heart, was telling us these words incessantly: O all you who pass by the way, consider and observe if there is a pain like my pain”.

“In fact, we saw, on this rich painting, sufferings that one could never imagine. We also saw the traces of a face all livid and all tortured by blows, his divine head pierced by large thorns, from which rivulets of blood flowed that ran down his forehead and divided into different branches, dressing it in the most precious purple in the world”.

“We noticed, on the left side of the forehead, a drop larger than the others and longer, which meanders like a wave; the eyebrows appeared well defined; the eyes a little less so; the nose, as the most prominent part of the face, is well impressed; the mouth is well composed, and rather small; the cheeks swollen and disfigured, show enough that they have been cruelly struck, and particularly the right one; the beard is neither too long, nor too short, in the style of the Nazarenes; it is seen to be sparse in some places, because they had torn part of it out of contempt, and the blood had glued the rest”.

“Then we saw a long trail running down his neck, which made us believe that he was bound with an iron chain during his capture in the Garden of Olives; for he appears swollen in several places as if he had been pulled and shaken; the bruises and the lashes are so thick on his stomach that one can hardly find an area the size of a pinhead free from blows; they continually crossed each other and extended along the whole body, down to the soles of the feet; the large clot of blood marks the holes in his feet.”

“On the left hand, which is very well marked and crossed on the right of which it covers the wound, the nail holes are in the center of the long and beautiful hands, from where a trickle of blood winds from the height of the ribs to the shoulders; the arms are quite long and beautiful, they are in such a position that they leave the entire belly visible, cruelly torn by the blows of the scourge; the wound of the divine side appears to be wide enough for three fingers to pass through, surrounded by a trail of blood four fingers wide, which narrows from the bottom and is about half a foot long”.

“On the second half of this Holy Shroud which represents the back of our Savior, one sees the nape of the head pierced by long and thick thorns, which are so thick that one can see that the crown was made like a hat and not in a circle like those of princes, and as the painters represent it; when one observes it carefully, one sees the nape of the neck more torn than the rest and the thorns stuck more deeply, with large drops of coagulated blood in the hair, which is completely bloody; the traces of blood under the nape of the neck are larger and more visible than the others, because the sticks with which they beat on the crown made the thorns enter right up to the brain, so that having received mortal wounds, it was a miracle that he had not died under the blows; furthermore they reopened

because of the jolt of the cross when they placed it in the hole, and even before that when they made him fall on the cross to nail him there; the shoulders are completely torn and bombarded with blows of the scourge that extend everywhere”.

“The drops of blood appear as large as marjoram leaves; in several places, there are large fractures due to the blows they gave him; in the middle of the body you can see the marks of the iron chain that tied him so tightly to the column that he appears all bloody; the diversity of the blows shows that they used different types of scourges, such as rods with twisted thorns, iron cords that tore him so cruelly that looking at the Shroud from below, when it was stretched out on the Holland cloth of the support, we saw the wounds as if we were looking through a stained glass window”.

“All the Sisters contemplated him very attentively, with a consolation that cannot be expressed, and we saw through these beautiful prints how truly he was the most beautiful of the sons of men, in accordance with the prophecy of David, who had foretold it in one of his psalms.”

On August 21, 1567, Francis de Sales was born, who later became bishop of Geneva and a saint. A great devotee of the Shroud, he said: “It is the shield of this country, it is our great relic... Certainly, I have a special reason to be devoted to it, because my mother dedicated me to Our Lord, when I was in her womb, before this holy banner of salvation”.

Another great devotee of the Shroud was Carlo Borromeo, archbishop of Milan and saint. In 1576 he prayed with faith to the Lord, imploring an end to the plague that was afflicting his city. He vowed to go on foot to venerate the Shroud if his prayers were answered. God heard his prayers and the plague stopped. The journey in fulfillment of the vow had to be completed and the cardinal thus prepared to face a long journey of about three hundred and fifty kilometers, which also included crossing the Alps.

Having learned of the cardinal’s pious intentions, Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy seized the long-awaited opportunity to transfer the Shroud and at the beginning of September 1578 he organized the transport of the relic to Turin, where he intended it to be preserved. A solemn exhibition was held in which Cardinal Borromeo participated, who proposed that the supreme adoration be considered to be due to the Shroud: “Because this adoration referred to the divine Person who had placed it in contact with his own Body and stained it with his most precious Blood; just as the love with which one kisses the portrait of a father does not refer to the paper on which the image of the father is painted, but to the person of the father himself. Just as Jesus left an image imprinted on that linen which would be a perennial monument of his love for us, so much more does he desire that his image be imprinted on our souls, and since we receive the Body of Jesus Christ so many times in Holy Communion, as that Shroud received it in itself, it would be our fault if the image of his passion and death did not remain alive and expressed in us too.”

In 1627 Agaffino Solaro of the Counts of Moretta, bishop of Fossano, in his work *Sindone, Evangelica, Historica e Theologica* highlighted that the cross had received Jesus alive and had returned him dead, while the Shroud had received him dead and had returned him alive and glorious. This phrase is also attributed to the Oratorian theologian Sebastiano Valfrè, to whom in 1694 Duke Vittorio Amedeo II entrusted a delicate task, described by the Salesian historian Luigi Fossati as follows: “Behind closed doors, in the presence of the duke, the duchess and some dignitaries, with many lit candles, out of devotion and to better observe the cloth, the Shroud was laid out, in its entire length – 4.36 meters – on a large table. A rip was noticed between the hem and the cloth which strengthened the linen: it had to be sewn back together. Valfrè immediately set to work, assisted by the Duchess who served him with scissors, needle and thread. The damage was repaired with three hours of intense work, during which the servant of God did nothing but weep with tenderness and emotion. The Duke had expressed the desire to be able to keep, as a relic, a thread from the Holy Shroud. Before starting the repair, the Blessed took a thread from the unstitched part and brought it with him to the Congregation, placed it in a small temporary case, always keeping a lamp lit there, until a precious golden case, in the shape of a heart, was prepared; as soon as it was ready, he called Father Ainesio again and, having lit many candles, as if for a solemn function, on their knees, they placed the thread into the case to bring to the Duke, who received it with great devotion, put it around

his neck and never let it go. In exchange for the gift and the work done, Valfrè received a large part of the two silk veils – one black to symbolize death, the other crimson to symbolize the resurrection – within which, until then, the Holy Shroud had been kept. Valfrè cut them into very small pieces which he distributed, like precious relics, only to people he deemed prepared to receive them and preserve them with due reverence”.

Among the popes who paid homage to the Shroud, highlighting its value, we must remember Pius VII, who venerated it privately on November 13th 1804 and again in the solemn public exhibition of 1815. The pope himself on this occasion exhibited the Shroud from the balconies of Palazzo Madama on May 21st.

In 1842 and 1868 two new exhibitions were held, in which Giovanni Bosco, founder of the Salesians and saint, participated with the young people of his oratory.

A solemn exhibition took place in 1898 to solemnize some important anniversaries.

The words of a journalist, correspondent in Turin for the *Lega Lombarda* magazine, are striking: “I saw it one of the last nights in a very special way, and if it had not been for the excommunication imposed on anyone who even out of devotion touched it, I could have touched and kissed it. That sheet is something terribly moving. The whole person of Our Lord is imprinted on it”.

The proposal to photograph the Shroud was submitted to King Umberto I. The task of carrying it out was entrusted to the lawyer and photographer from Asti Secondo Pia, who had offered to carry out the work at his own expense and with the renunciation of all artistic property. The undertaking was far from simple to complete with the technical equipment available at the time. After several attempts, conducted amid many difficulties, Pia finally succeeded in his intent and took the plates to the photographic studio in his home.

Here is how the historian Giuseppe Pugno describes the moment of development: “The operator, who was Pia himself, could not believe his eyes. Observing the faint dark spots that, little by little, were taking shape as the development proceeded, the astonished operator saw that the image of a man was indeed forming, stretched out and composed in the severe attitude of death, but not in negative, as it should have appeared on a plate, which for this very reason is called negative, but in positive; the image carried by the Shroud was therefore negative. The same operator said that he almost was taken ill and with difficulty managed to prevent the plate from falling, his hands trembling and clumsy in the difficult handling of the bulky glass plate barely illuminated by the very faint red light of the darkroom. A calmer and more careful examination of the plate as soon as it was fixed confirmed that it had all the characteristics of a positive, while the Shroud appeared, after this accidental warning, to be a perfect negative”.

Pia himself, in a memoir addressed to the historian Arthur Loth, stated: “Locked in the darkroom, completely intent on my work, I felt a very strong emotion when, during development, I saw the Holy Face appear on the plate for the first time, so clearly that I was amazed and at the same time happy, since from that moment I could be sure of the success of my undertaking”.

As he recalled those moments, as he relived the trepidation that had gripped him, making him tremble, the photographer’s eyes moistened with emotion. Pia himself advanced various hypotheses on this phenomenon, but he had to reject every explanation other than the most obvious: what appeared on the negative was exactly what his camera had seen on the fabric.

Pope Leo XIII considered the Shroud to be the true and authentic cloth of the passion of Jesus Christ. Secondo Pia’s photograph was shown to him and the Pope was pleased with the event, which opened the way to many experiments and historical-scientific studies. He underlined his opinion by declaring photography an appropriate means for the times to foster a reawakening of religious sentiment everywhere.

A few years later, the writer Paul Claudel commented on the discovery of the photographic negative with these words: “It is Him! It is His face! That face that has consumed so many saints and prophets with the desire to contemplate it, according to the words of the psalm: Your face, Lord, I seek. We have it! Already in this life we are allowed to look face to face, as much as we want, the Son of God. Because a photograph is not a portrait made by a man.”

Until 1898, the Shroud had been only an object of devotion. Pia's photographs brought about a turning point in the knowledge of it and aroused the interest of the scientific world. The relic of the passion, death and burial became an object of research.

One of the first academics to address the problem of identifying the Man of the Shroud was the eminent biologist Yves Delage, a member of the Academy of Sciences of Paris and professor at the Sorbonne. On April 21st 1902 he presented to the Academy of Sciences a report with the results of research conducted with the biologist Paul Vignon.

The biologist, notoriously agnostic, caused a stir by declaring that he believed the Shroud to be authentic, that is, the original burial cloth of Christ. The reaction was immediate: the secretary of the Academy, Marcelin Berthelot, did not allow the complete report to be published in the Proceedings of the Academy, but only a summary text on the first part was accepted, therefore without any reference to the Shroud or even to Jesus. Embittered, Delage wrote a long letter in which he contested the reasons for the refusal. He addressed it to Charles Richet, director of the *Revue Scientifique*, who published it.

In Delage's text we read, among other things: "If, instead of Christ, it had been a Sargon, an Achilles or any Pharaoh, no one would have found anything to complain about". And further on he adds: "I consider Christ as a historical figure and I do not understand why people are scandalized that there be a material trace of his existence".

In 1930, the wedding of Umberto of Savoy, Crown Prince, and Princess Maria José of Belgium was celebrated; however, at that time the archiepiscopal seat of Turin was vacant. The exhibition awaited the appointment of the new archbishop, Maurilio Fossati, who was convinced by Pope Pius XI to overcome his fear of the doubts of those who denied the authenticity of the Shroud. During the meeting with the archbishop, Pius XI said: "Rest assured: we are speaking at this moment as a scholar and not as a Pope. We have personally followed the studies on the Holy Shroud and we are persuaded of its authenticity. There have been some objections, but they do not hold up".

The public exhibition took place from May 4th to the 24th of the year 1931. The king gave permission to take a new series of photographs. The archbishop chose Giuseppe Enrie, considered one of the best photographers in Italy. The photographs were taken before the closing ceremony of the exhibition, between May 22nd and 23rd. The photographer described all his work in an important book. In the introduction he explained the reasons why he had not written his work immediately after photographing the Shroud: "I had realized that the state of my soul, which had just emerged from a series of exceptional emotions, was not yet sufficiently serene to tackle even a modest job of technical exposition and discussion. The pen would certainly not have been able to resist the temptation of lyrically reliving the unforgettable event through my deep impressions, rather than expounding, with analytical and clear reasoning, the results of my technical investigations, of my own and other people's experiences".

On September 26th, 1936, Pope Pius XI spoke to the participants of the VI Biblical Week. Referring to the Shroud, he stated: "That face is something truly impressive: a beauty so virile, so robust, so truly divine; a serenity so sad, so delicately sad, a sweetly serene sadness and above all a gaze that does not exist, and yet surprises, is seen. It does not exist because the eyelids are lowered, however it is not a blind face, but full of light, of a hidden gaze that reaches you even behind the eyelids. This beauty of the Shroud is impressive in its magnificent solidity and solemnity."

The historian Fossati wrote of Pius XI: "It can be said that if during his life Pius XI was a scholar of the Shroud, in his last years he became a fervent and enthusiastic devotee. The closer the hour of his death approached, the more he felt the need to talk about the Holy Shroud."

With the outbreak of the Second World War, it was deemed necessary to hide the Shroud in a safe place. After various hypotheses, it was decided to secretly transfer it and keep it in the Abbey of Montevergine, near Avellino.

At the end of the war, once the dangers had passed, the Shroud was to return to Turin. It was the Archbishop of Turin himself, Cardinal Fossati, who went to collect the relic. Fossati arrived in Rome and then left for Montevergine by car on October 28th, 1946. Two other cars were in tow, with

important people, including the doctor Luigi Gedda. Fossati, out of recognition and gratitude towards the monks, accepted a request they had made, authorizing a very brief private exhibition. During the night between October 28th and 29th, the Shroud was unfolded on a long table covered with altar cloths.

Gedda wrote: “In the presence of the relic, the atmosphere of expectation that hovered in the hearts of those present was transformed into emotional devotion, which found its way of expressing itself in prayer. The study of the Shroud, for those who know how to read the extraordinary document, nourishes in a very effective way the devotion towards the passion of Christ and provides details about it so new and abundant that perhaps one day it will be possible to write the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to the Shroud”.

On the occasion of the televised exhibition of November 23rd, 1973, Saint Paul VI stated: “We too, as if we were present, fix the gaze of our spirit with the most attentive and devout admiration on the Holy Shroud, of which a pious and extraordinary exhibition is now being arranged in Turin, custodian of such a singular relic. We know how many studies are concentrated around this famous relic, and we are not unaware of how much fervent and moving piety surrounds it. We personally still remember the vivid impression that was imprinted on our souls when, in May 1931, we had the good fortune to witness, on the occasion of a special cult paid at the time to the Holy Shroud, its projection on a large and luminous screen, and the face of Christ, depicted there, appeared to us so true, so profound, so human and divine, as in no other image had we been able to admire and venerate; that was for us a moment of singular enchantment. Great fortune then is ours, if this alleged surviving effigy of the Holy Shroud allows us to contemplate some authentic lineaments of the adorable physical figure of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if it truly helps our greed, so burning today, to be able to also visibly know him! Gathered around such a precious and pious heirloom, the mysterious fascination of Him will grow in all of us, believers or unbelievers, and the evangelical warning of His voice will resound in our hearts, inviting us to seek Him there, where He still hides and allows Himself to be discovered, loved and served in human form: “As often as you have done anything for one of the least of my brothers, you will have done it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

On April 13th, 1980 in Turin, Saint John Paul II, during the Mass, said in his homily: “The Paschal Mystery has found here some of its splendid witnesses and apostles, in particular between the 19th and 20th centuries. It could not, after all, be otherwise in the city that preserves an unusual and mysterious relic like the Holy Shroud, a singular witness – if we accept the arguments of many scientists – of Easter: of the passion, of the death and of the resurrection. A silent witness, but at the same time surprisingly eloquent!”

In 1988, the Shroud was submitted to radiocarbon testing, which placed its origin in the period 1260-1390 AD. This verdict has been authoritatively denied by a subsequent scientific publication in Archaeometry. But at the moment when the test result was announced [in 1988] Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero used the word “icon” in the official press release. This prompted a question that the journalist Orazio Petrosillo posed to Saint John Paul II, taking advantage of the flight to Madagascar on April 28th, 1989. The question concerned the definition of the Shroud after the radiocarbon test: icon, no longer a relic?

The Pope stated without hesitation: “It is certainly a relic; it cannot be changed. If it were not a relic, one could not understand these reactions of faith that surround it, and which prove to be even stronger than the evidence, let us say the counter-evidence of a scientific nature. In this sense, the relic is always an object of faith. The icon can be an object of faith, and it often is, but it is also an object of culture, of art”.

A year before his death, Cardinal Ballestrero stated in an interview: “I, instinctively, think that it is authentic and therefore I understand well how science tries to understand how. The fact of the negative is indisputable. Explain it, however! Those scientists are right who say: whoever denies the authenticity of the Shroud must explain to us through which procedures this hypothetical forger managed to obtain a negative, at a time when nothing was known about the negative. And about three-dimensionality, even worse! But then the impressive correspondence between the evangelical

description of the passion, the torture, the crown of thorns, the crucifixion, the piercing and the data on the Shroud: it is a great miracle! The discourse of science goes its own way: and it is very clear that it is far from exhaustive with respect to this disconcerting Shroud cloth that evokes the Face of Christ, and not only the Face, that evokes the mystery of the passion and death of the Lord, and perhaps also of His resurrection”.

Saint John Paul II, in his speech on May 24, 1998 during the veneration of the Shroud, stated: “Before the Shroud, the intense and agonizing image of an unspeakable torment, I wish to thank the Lord for this unique gift, which asks for the believer's loving attention and complete willingness to follow the Lord. The Shroud is a challenge to our intelligence. It first of all requires of every person, particularly the researcher, that he humbly grasp the profound message it sends to his reason and his life. The mysterious fascination of the Shroud forces questions to be raised about the sacred Linen and the historical life of Jesus. For the believer, what counts above all is that the Shroud is a mirror of the Gospel. In fact, if we reflect on the sacred Linen, we cannot escape the idea that the image it presents has such a profound relationship with what the Gospels tell of Jesus' passion and death, that every sensitive person feels inwardly touched and moved at beholding it. The Shroud shows us Jesus at the moment of his greatest helplessness and reminds us that in the abasement of that death lies the salvation of the whole world. The Shroud thus becomes an invitation to face every experience, including that of suffering and extreme helplessness, with the attitude of those who believe that God's merciful love overcomes every poverty, every limitation, every temptation to despair.”

On the occasion of the exposition in [the year] 2000 Cardinal Severino Poletto wrote a prayer: “Lord Jesus, while in silent prayer I contemplate the Holy Shroud, my heart fills with emotion because I see in that mysterious Holy Linen all the signs of the atrocious suffering you experienced in your passion, as narrated in the Gospels. The drama of your pain is made evident by the blood I see on your body from the crown of thorns and the lashes of the scourge, from the nails in your hands and feet and from your heart pierced by the soldier's spear. When, together with the Virgin Mary, your and our Mother, I adore You, Jesus, suffering and sacrificed, I understand more clearly that You have taken upon Yourself the pains and crosses of all humanity. All my suffering, united with your suffering, receives as a gift a redemptive value by which I feel supported, consoled and forgiven by You. I know that there is no consolation without conversion, so, while with your help I carry my crosses with trust, I promise you to begin a new life by distancing myself from sin, so that I can experience that I have been healed by your wounds. Amen”.

In the meditations of the Via Crucis at the Colosseum on Good Friday in 2005, Joseph Ratzinger, then a cardinal, in the text in which he reflects on the moment of the crucifixion of Jesus with the nails, said: “Jesus is nailed to the cross. The Shroud of Turin allows us to have an idea of the incredible cruelty of this procedure”.

In the second volume of his trilogy on Jesus, Ratzinger wrote: “Furthermore, the information that Joseph bought a shroud in which he wrapped the deceased is important. While the Synoptics simply speak of a shroud in the singular, John uses the plural linen cloths (cf. 19:40) according to Jewish burial custom – the story of the resurrection returns to this in even more detail. The question of concordance with the Shroud of Turin need not concern us here; in any case, the appearance of this relic is in principle reconcilable with both reports.”

In his speech on May 2nd 2010 during the veneration of the Shroud, Benedict XVI stated: “I thank God for the gift of this Pilgrimage and also for the opportunity to share with you a brief meditation inspired by the subtitle of this solemn Exposition: ‘The Mystery of Holy Saturday’. One could say that the Shroud is the Icon of this mystery, the Icon of Holy Saturday. Indeed it is a winding-sheet that was wrapped round the body of a man who was crucified, corresponding in every way to what the Gospels tell us of Jesus who, crucified at about noon, died at about three o'clock in the afternoon. At nightfall, since it was Parasceve, that is, the eve of Holy Saturday, Joseph of Arimathea, a rich and authoritative member of the Sanhedrin, courageously asked Pontius Pilate for permission to bury Jesus in his new tomb which he had had hewn out in the rock not far from Golgotha. Having obtained permission, he bought a linen cloth, and after Jesus was taken down from the Cross, wrapped him in

that shroud and buried him in that tomb (cf. Mk 15: 42-46). This is what the Gospel of St Mark says and the other Evangelists are in agreement with him. From that moment, Jesus remained in the tomb until dawn of the day after the Sabbath and the Turin Shroud presents to us an image of how his body lay in the tomb during that period which was chronologically brief (about a day and a half), but immense, infinite in its value and in its significance. This is the mystery of Holy Saturday! Truly from there, from the darkness of the death of the Son of God, the light of a new hope gleamed: the light of the Resurrection. And it seems to me that, looking at this sacred Cloth through the eyes of faith, one may perceive something of this light. Effectively, the Shroud was immersed in that profound darkness that was at the same time luminous; and I think that if thousands and thousands of people come to venerate it without counting those who contemplate it through images it is because they see in it not only darkness but also the light; not so much the defeat of life and of love, but rather victory, the victory of life over death, of love over hatred. They indeed see the death of Jesus, but they also see his Resurrection; in the bosom of death, life is now vibrant, since love dwells within it.”

Announcing the televised exhibition in 2013, the Archbishop of Turin Cesare Nosiglia said: “The Church of Turin intends to guard the Shroud not only as a precious relic, but as a constant stimulus to base its life on its faith in Christ”. On that occasion Pope Francis stated: “Even if it takes place in this way, we do not merely ‘look’, but rather we venerate by a prayerful gaze. I would go further: we are in fact looked upon ourselves. This face has eyes that are closed, it is the face of one who is dead, and yet mysteriously he is watching us, and in silence he speaks to us. How is this possible? How is it that the faithful, like you, pause before this icon of a man scourged and crucified? It is because the Man of the Shroud invites us to contemplate Jesus of Nazareth. This image, impressed upon the cloth, speaks to our heart and moves us to climb the hill of Calvary, to look upon the wood of the Cross, and to immerse ourselves in the eloquent silence of love. Let us therefore allow ourselves to be reached by this look, which is directed not to our eyes but to our heart. In silence, let us listen to what he has to say to us from beyond death itself. By means of the Holy Shroud, the unique and supreme Word of God comes to us: Love made man, incarnate in our history; the merciful love of God who has taken upon himself all the evil of the world to free us from its power. The face in the Shroud conveys a great peace; this tortured body expresses a sovereign majesty. It is as if it let a restrained but powerful energy within it shine through, as if to say: have faith, do not lose hope; the power of the love of God, the power of the Risen One overcomes all things.”

In the press conference of March 15th, 2025, Cardinal Roberto Repole, Archbishop of Turin, said: “The Shroud invites us to reflect on the concept of hope, the theme of the Jubilee Year 2025, in a dual dimension: on the one hand, the face and body imprinted on the Shroud Cloth are those of someone defeated by history, but on the other, it is the cast of someone who is no longer in the tomb. In the Christian tradition, hope is God and what can constitute hope is that we look at the Shroud face with new eyes: it is also the cast of the Resurrection, which says that God can intervene”.

In the Man of the Shroud we contemplate, likely, the very Face of Christ, captured between death and resurrection. The luminous Face of the Risen One addresses to each of us an invitation to become aware of the authentic value of existence and seems to tell us: You are, you are alive, living, now, forever.