

A New Owner - and new custodian - for the Shroud

One of the less publicised results of Pope Benedict XVI's surprise resignation earlier this year was the Shroud's ownership automatically passing to his successor, 76-year old, Argentinian-born Pope Francis. And for the Shroud this change came not very long after a change in its official custodian. When Cardinal Severino Poletto retired as Archbishop of Turin in October 2010, he was succeeded by Cesare Nosiglia, former archbishop of Vicenza.

In the event, following Pope Francis' election on March 13, he rather swiftly became obliged to act publicly as the Shroud's new owner. This was because one of Pope Benedict's very last acts as pope had been to authorise the Shroud being shown publicly this Easter Saturday, March 30, in conjunction with a ninety-minute service in Turin Cathedral scheduled to be screened live on Italy's RAI TV. Sadly very few (if any) English language TV stations took the opportunity to transmit the programme, mostly showing instead just a very brief as part of the world news. However at the time of this Newsletter going to press the programme could still be viewed via the following Internet link: (No longer available)

<http://www.rai.tv/dl/replaytv/replaytv.html#ch=1&day=2013-03-30&v=196967&vd=2013-03-30&vc=1>

After a prelude of devotional music and readings as Cardinal Nosiglia knelt before the Shroud's special shrine to the left of the Cathedral nave, the curtains were opened, revealing the Shroud in display mode behind. Filming in High Definition the cameras intermittently went into close-ups of details of the Shroud, the picture quality inevitably being altogether superior to when the Shroud was first televised in colour in November 1973. And a particular highlight of the programme was a recorded message from Pope Francis, whose sentiments were arguably the most intimate, moving and powerful to have come from any Pope in history with regard to the Shroud.

“Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I join all of you gathered before the Holy Shroud, and I thank the Lord who, through modern technology, offers us this possibility.”

“Even if it takes place in this way, our gaze is not a mere 'observing', but rather a veneration. It is a prayerful gaze. I would go further: It is a letting ourselves be looked upon. 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 who has been 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 hearts 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.”



Pope Francis on the Shroud: 'It is as if it let a restrained but powerful energy within it shine through...'

“Let us therefore allow ourselves to be reached by this gaze, which is directed not to our eyes but to our hearts. 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 in order to free us from its power. This disfigured Face resembles all those faces of men and women marred by a life that does not respect their dignity, by war and the violence that afflict the weakest... And yet, the Face of 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 tell us: have faith; do not lose hope; the power of God's love, the power of the Risen One, conquers all.”

“So, looking upon the Man of the Shroud, I make Saint Francis of Assisi's prayer before the Crucifix my own: 'Most High and glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart, and grant me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and understanding, Lord, so that I may carry out your holy and true command. Amen.'”