

AN EXTRAORDINARY EXPOSITION

BENEDICTINE MONKS

At the outbreak of World War II, the Shroud was transferred from Turin to a place of safety, as indeed had been done in 1918 and many times previously. On 25 September 1939, it was taken in secret to the Benedictine monastery of Montevergine, in the province of Avellino, northeast of Naples. In *Sindon* #9, May 1965, Mons. Adolfo Barberis published the notarized document of the transfer to Montevergine and an excerpt from the account, in the monastery archives, of the removal of the Shroud, seven years later, and its return to Turin.

We present two less formal accounts from *La Santa Sindone*, bulletin of the Holy Shroud Chapel of the Cathedral of St. John Baptist (#9, Oct. 1966). Again, the first recalls the Shroud's arrival; the second is reminiscence, twenty years later, of the unforgettable experience of a close, direct viewing of the Cloth and its incredible Image. Written by monks who make no pretence of literary prowess, these two accounts betray an immediacy and vivacity which comes from the heart.

The Arrival of the Shroud to Montevergine; 25 September 1939

One day at Montevergine there was an unusual confusion, an anxious bustling back and forth, a subdued and mysterious whispering. The monks that day were at a loss to explain the exceptional activity. In fact, besides Father Abbot, the secret was known only to the Prior, the Vicar General, and two monks who ordinarily remain on the mountain even during the winter months. To them, therefore, to whom the sacred deposit was particularly entrusted, there was given also a document giving them the authority, and putting in their exclusive power, to transfer the Holy Relic, if they should believe it necessary, even outside of their monastery.* In the meantime, an elderly priest, the Canon Paolo Brusa, custodian of the Holy Shroud, who had arrived unexpectedly to the mountain, wanted to celebrate Holy Mass at the altar in the Chapel of the Night Choir. My monks, acting on intuition because of that celebration in the unaccustomed place, run to the Missal, flip the pages. ... The elderly priest had celebrated the very Mass of the Holy Shroud. They had grasped the great mystery. But the intuition that there must be some obvious connection between that Mass celebrated in such an unusual place and the

* This was done; for a short time, the Shroud was securely closed inside a small chamber especially excavated in the mountain.

great mystery still undiscovered, was enlightened in their minds by the affective sight of the many copious tears that the priest had shed during the whole time of the celebration of the Sacrifice. When you read, if ever you do, good priest, that it was your tears that betrayed your secret, you will learn also that in that day those monks deduced, not only your position as Chaplain to the King and Custodian of the Shroud, but also your faith, your love, which were the only, true, great and powerful magnets which attracted the most precious Cloth back again to your Turin.

Extract from *I rubini della Passione*,
by Don Federico Renzullo, C.PP.S.
(Bari 1950)

The Extraordinary Exposition of 28 October 1946

When Cardinal Fossati, Archbishop of Turin, came to Montevergine to recover the Holy Shroud and transport it back to its habitual place, he found only a small group of Fathers in charge of the Sanctuary, as the majority of the monastic Community were already at the Abbey of Loreto. Conversing with the Cardinal, whose exquisite paternalism and benevolence were evident, at a certain moment the Father Prior, Don Roberto D'Amore, and the undersigned became so bold as to request to see the precious Relic which we had guarded for so many years. The Cardinal did not need to be asked twice, but, smiling, answered, "Yes, yes, you deserve to see it after you have guarded it so well."

The alarm was given immediately. We pounced upon the telephone to inform the religious who were at Loreto, so that those who wished to take advantage of this opportunity could come up to the Sanctuary for the extraordinary event. In the Reception Hall we made a large table by putting two tables end-to-end, so as to have sufficient space on which to unfold the roll which enclosed the Holy Shroud.

When the religious had arrived from Loreto, and Prof. Gedda from Avellino, we proceeded to carry the Holy Shroud from the Night Choir, where it was still deposited, to the Reception Hall. Already the most lively commotion could be clearly read on the faces of everyone. When the chest which held the Holy Relic had been brought into the Hall and laid upon the table, Prof. Gedda gave a conference to dispose our minds to the exceptional event, so that, by understanding, we would derive more abundant fruits. The conference was enlivened by extremely interesting slides. When that was finished, the authenticity seals of the sacred deposit were broken and the extraordinary exhibition began. The whole Community was around the long tables, arranged in the center of the Hall.

There was a solemn warning: *Nobody is to touch the Holy Relic!* The tension in our souls was extreme. Prof. Gedda, with a little wand, but without touching the Holy Shroud, pointed out the more characteristic features.

The Cardinal had made it known that this exhibition conceded to the Community of Montevergine was a truly extraordinary privilege, not only because it had not been a part of the plan, but also because the Holy Shroud was shown in a way that even the fortunate custodians of Turin very very rarely had had a chance like that. We were infinitely grateful.

Thank you for giving me this occasion to recall anew that unforgettable day of my life, that happy event which has remained so profoundly cleft in our hearts.

Don Giovanni Mongelli, O.S.B.
Monk of Montevergine

A few highlights from the texts quoted by Mons. Barberis fill out the story. In the first document is a description of the box in which the reliquary, containing the Shroud, was prepared for its journey: The silver reliquary was put into a chest of wood, closed by screws; this was wrapped in a white cloth, sewn all around and girt with twine; the knots were secured with lead seals, stamped with the initials of the Chief Administrator of the Royal House of Savoy. The chest was 1.40m x 0.365m x 0.28m. On the outside, for identification, was written: Reliquaries.



The second account, elaborated by afterthought, records the exposition. On 28 October 1946, at 10:30 p.m., the case was removed from the altar; the seals were examined; then, to the chants of *Vexilla Regis*, the chest was carried in procession to the Reception Hall. About midnight, the Cardinal "with his own hands" opened the silver reliquary. The Shroud was laid out for veneration; replaced in the reliquary at 1:30 a.m. The monks from Loreto returned to the Abbey that same night. The entire ceremony was recorded on a documentary film of 130 metres.

Cardinal Maurilio Fossati
Archbishop of Turin († 1965)
"The Cardinal of the Shroud"