



The Shroud of Turin (or Turin Shroud) is a linen cloth bearing the image of a man who suffered physical trauma in a manner consistent with crucifixion and Holy Gospels. It is kept in the royal chapel of the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, northern Italy. The cloth was placed on the body of Jesus Christ at the time of his burial, and the face image imprinted on it is the Holy Face of Jesus.

The image on the shroud is much clearer in black-and-white negative than in its natural sepia color. The striking negative image was first observed on the evening of May 28, 1898, on the reverse photographic plate of amateur photographer Secondo Pia, who was allowed to photograph it while it was being exhibited in the Turin Cathedral.

Most probably, the Shroud of Turin is the single, most studied artifact in human history. According to Thaddeus J. Trenn of University of Toronto the Shroud of Turin remains an enigmatic bequest, accessible ultimately only by an act of faith in Jesus Christ. To expect that one could either prove or disprove the Resurrection event by mere human ingenuity and reason would be idolatrous. Yet something about this event may ultimately deepen our appreciation of the Turin Shroud. To interpose science as an adjudicator of faith would be but a reflection of human pride. But, perhaps an even greater error would be to interpose the Shroud itself. Perceived idolatry, the bane of the Knights Templar, sealed their fate. Faith in Christ should not depend upon any sort of idol, sacred or profane. Believing in the Shroud for its own sake could turn it into just another golden calf. Only by keeping one's spiritual priorities straight can one avoid this subtle danger. Indeed, this may be considered the single most important dilemma for the Shroud. Whatever function it might have, the Shroud must not become the object of one's faith or a condition for faith.

In the Christian tradition, deep faith is ever open to the wideness of God's mercy. With humility, it accepts the faithfulness of His sustaining hand exhibited in the law-like behavior of the universe. While structured, God's Creation yet yawns with an unspeakable range

## THE HOLY SHROUD: THE RESURRECTION IS A FACT

of novelty oft capable of transforming that same reality within which man remains inwrought, before our very eyes. And, this, unrestricted by the poverty of our range of expectations. The Shroud of Turin might be confronting man with a glimpse of a portentous, deeper reality — a veiled hint of glory revealed through faith in ways one may appreciate, if not totally understand or comprehend. Christ clearly would manifest Himself only to those who believe. That was the implication of His somewhat cryptic response to his disciple, Jude Thaddeus, who asked: «Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?» (John 14: 22). Jesus answered him, «those who love me will keep my word» (John 14: 23). Neither blind faith nor perfunctory belief can substitute for heart-felt faith, laced with love.

Such utter faith traces the steps of one Blaise Pascal who wagered that the less-traveled road of patient openness was the wiser path to follow. One willing to share with Dante's humble pilgrim in his quiet meditation upon that blessed countenance dares ask: «My Lord Jesus Christ, very God, was this then your true semblance» (Divine Comedy ca 1300: Paradiso 31)? While pondering, yet expecting no reply other than the welcome warmth of His gentle gaze. For, in the twilight zone twixt faith and reason, this Silent Witness, this Divine Artist, beckons ultimately to the heart, finally become open to receive His poignant message of unconditional love.

The resurrection is of course, the foundation of the Christian system. The apostolic church established its credibility objectively and evidentially, i. e. eyewitness testimony. Skeptics were invited to check the evidence. Never was it suggested that anyone accept the resurrection on emotional or devotional grounds («You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart).

As the church of the first three centuries evolved into an imperial state church, it adopted dualistic epistemology (theory of knowledge) as codified by Augustine. This to say that the unbeliever is incapable of faith so God infused it into the elect by a miraculous process. Faith emerged the enemy of reason.

The move from learned faith to infused truth was, of course, the move from evidence to mysticism...

When we look at the twentieth century, we discover that both Barth and Bultmann have injected their own ideological bias into the contemporary Protestant mind set. The Rev. Dr. David Scaer sums it succinctly in noting:

Karl Barth based his theology on a concept of «God's Word» which had no need of real history. The reluctance of much of conservative Protestantism to tackle such thorny theological questions as the authenticity of the shroud may, in fact, derive from the unrecognized Barthianism that relies on the «Heavenly Word» and ignores historical questions. Answering historical questions often in fact, considered the height of unbelief by the followers of Barth...

History's very preservation of this Holy Cloth should alert us to a divine purpose which should not — and must not — be ignored. Though no branch of Christianity has ever required belief in the Shroud's authenticity as an article of faith, many denominations are now coming to perceive that it can do much in the way of adding both depth and detail to a faith already held

The Shroud of Turin is an authentic link with a past which was not only sacred but real. Acceptance of the authenticity of the Shroud obviously cannot be made a criterion for orthodoxy, but a prior refusal to consider the question borders on disregard of the historical claims of Christianity. Perhaps we shall be given the same opportunity as Peter and John to see the burial garments of the Lord. (John 20:6,7).

If in the recognition of the face and hands and feet and all the other wounds (on the Holy Shroud), we, like those who knew Him best, are led to say, «It is the Lord!», then perhaps we may have to learn to count ourselves also among those who have «seen and be-

«**B**lessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.»

«Poor in spirit» means to be humble. Humility is the realization that all your gifts and blessings come from the grace of God. To have poverty of spirit means to be completely empty and open to the Word of God. When we are an empty cup and devoid of pride, we are humble. Humility brings an openness and an inner peace, allowing one to do the will of God. He who humbles himself is able to accept our frail nature, to repent, and to allow the grace of God to lead us to Conversion.

It is pride, the opposite of humility, that brings misery. For pride brings anger and the seeking of revenge, especially when one is offended. If every man were humble and poor in spirit, there would be no war!

«**Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**»

If we are humble and appreciate that all of our gifts and blessings come from God, we grow in love and gratitude for Jesus Christ our Savior. But this can only produce mourning and regret over our own sins and the sins of this world, for we have hurt the one who has been so good to us. One also mourns for the suffering of others.

## BEATITUDES OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

St. Gregory describes another reason to mourn: the more one ascends in meditation of Divine Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and then realize the poverty of human nature, man can only be left in sorrow. When one contemplates that we were made in the image and likeness of God and lived in Paradise, the Garden of Eden, and compare that to our present state after the Fall, one can only mourn our present condition. But the sentence continues that they shall be comforted, by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and hopefully one day in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mourning in this context is called a blessing, because mourning our fallen nature creates in us a desire to improve ourselves and to do what is right!

«**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**»

St. Gregory of Nyssa taught that the Beatitudes build one upon another. A humble person becomes meek, or becomes gentle and kind, and exhibits a docility of spirit, even in the face of adversity and hardship. A person that is meek is one that exhibits self-control. St. Augustine advises us to be meek in the face of the Lord, and not resist but

be obedient to him. Obedience and submission to the will of God are certainly not in vogue these days, but they will bring one peace in this world and in the next.

«**Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**»

A continuous desire for justice and moral perfection will lead one to a fulfillment of that desire — a transition and conversion to holiness. This is true for all the virtues — if you hunger and thirst for temperance, you will head towards the goal you have in mind. St. Augustine, in his discourse on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, notes the correspondence of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and their necessity in fulfilling the Beatitudes. For example, one must have the gift of fortitude so one may be courageous in seeking justice.

«**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**»

Mercy is the loving disposition towards those who suffer distress. Love, compassion, and forgiveness towards one's neighbour will bring peace in your relationships. We say in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses, as

we forgive those who trespass against us. As we are merciful to others, so our Heavenly Father will be merciful with us! Jesus reminds us that whatever «you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me (Matthew 25:31-46).» St. Paul calls for the obedience of faith in the beginning and end of his Letter to the Romans (1:5, 16:25-27). The following are ways to be merciful to your neighbour, as well as obedient in faith to Christ our Saviour.

The Corporal Works of Mercy: Feed the Hungry, Give drink to the thirsty, Clothe the naked, Shelter the homeless, Comfort the imprisoned, Visit the sick, Bury the dead.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy: Admonish sinners, Instruct the uninformed, Counsel the doubtful, Comfort the sorrowful, Be patient with those in error, Forgive offenses, Pray for the living and the dead.

«**Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.**»

Moses (Exodus 33:20), John (1:18), and Paul (1Timothy 6:16) all say that no one can see God here on earth! But Jesus says the pure of heart shall see God! To be pure of heart means to be free of all selfish intentions and self-seeking desires. What a beautiful goal! How many times have any of us performed an act perfectly free of any personal gain? Such

