

THE HOLY SHROUD: WITNESS AND SUMMONS

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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin saw four decisive moments in the history of the cosmos and of humanity, in ascending greatness: the Creation, the emergence of life, the emergence of humanity (each life bound to all the others), the Resurrection of Christ. Events of the past, they are nonetheless moments of our time, for each one of us; firstly in our faith, with its trials, its successes and failures; then perfected and unified in the light of Glory when our life will acquire an infinite dimension, when our individual personalities and sociality will be completely integrated; when "God will be all in all" (I Cor 15:28). In his study, *Introduction to Christianity*, J. Ratzinger recalls that in consequence of a true faith, all humanity will be gradually re-conquered and re-absorbed in the One Adam, in the one body of humankind. For it was Adam who took the first step toward that future in which humanity will be incorporated in a single entity, but in such a way that in that entity the single individual is not extinguished but, on the contrary, attains full knowledge of himself.

Is this the Utopian dream? No; it certainly is not for the man who lives by faith, for he knows that, advancing in years, he goes toward fullness, toward the "more" rather than the "less"; toward a true complete union with God, with the Risen Christ and with the fraternity of all those who direct their steps toward the same destination.

In this journey each believer lives the great reality of his faith in Christ, dead and risen, which begins by the offering of himself and culminates in a life without limits. For Jesus, the door between these two states is his death on the cross. From that moment, according to the best theology, Christ belongs totally to the Father and at the same time totally to mankind. It is the same for each of us: our sufferings, if united to the Cross of Christ, open the way from individual life to admit us to life in communion with others. Thus it is a passage from the individual to the social, as the passage between death and life (I Jo 3:13).

On the Holy Shroud, according to the experts, the perfection of the markings excludes the possibility that any movement, however minimal, could have occurred: therefore the Shroud is proof of death. At the same time the Holy Shroud proves the absence of decomposition, for that would have contaminated the perfection of the image: therefore

it can be called—as Pope John Paul II authoritatively called it—Witness of the Resurrection.

Here in the Shroud we see that transition from the temporary to the eternal, from the individual to the universal. From the Shroud emanates that powerful summons to the Person who lay in that sheet and now is Risen, the Sempiternal Son, with us always, as he promised, and living in the myriads of our brothers.

Science has recognized that this Shroud, this burial sheet, was used 2000 years ago; it continues to serve even to the present day, for it seems almost the necessary basis for a proper understanding of these words spoken by Jesus: *When I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself* (Jo 12:32).