

The Shroud is testimony. Don't ask science what it can't give you.

By [Giovanni Giacchi](#) /

Father Rafael Pascual has been dealing with the Holy Shroud for several years. Member of the Scientific Committee of the International Center of Sindonology of Turin, he speaks in this interview about the boundaries between faith and science. Born in Barcelona, director of the Othonia project on the Holy Relic preserved in the Piedmontese capital, philosopher and ordinary professor of the Pontifical University Regina Apostolorum, he organized numerous meetings on topics of science and faith: biological evolution, Eucharistic miracles and the Holy Shroud, among others. He was also awarded for his studies on the subject. He was director of the "Science and Faith" Institute and of the homonymous Master. For eleven years he has been directing and coordinating the teaching to obtain (in Italian, Spanish and English) the Diploma in Sindonological Studies. Here is the interview:

What does the image of Jesus of Nazareth tell us today?

The image of Jesus of Nazareth, which can be observed on the Holy Shroud, speaks to us of a closeness, of a great love, indeed, of the greatest love: that of giving one's life for friends. It speaks to us of great suffering, but carried out with patience, with endurance, with the awareness of its meaning and its value: the payment of the price of our redemption. It speaks to us of a heart pierced with love, of a blood shed for our salvation. It speaks to us of mercy, serenity and peace. He tells us that we are faced not with a deceased, but with a living, with one who had died and risen, who indeed has the power over death, and who wanted to leave us testimony and memory of all this in the precious linen preserved and venerated in Turin.

In the path of understanding the divine message in the Holy Shroud, how much can science help us and how much faith?

I believe that the Gospel principle applies here to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. We cannot ask science for what science cannot give us. So science can help us, up to a certain point, to make an analysis of the Shroud object, to put it in some way. Science can analyze the find, from different points of view, and offer us more or less objective information that can clarify some aspects and offer possible explanations, but up to a certain point. Today we know that there are still many unanswered questions about the Shroud, one above all how it was possible to form an image like the one that appears on the cloth, with such extraordinary characteristics,

such as negativity and three-dimensionality. Faith instead moves to another level. Faith is not so much interested in the objective fact (without denying it or ignoring it) but in the meaning and value of the Shroud, which appears at the same time as *relic* and as an *icon* (two indeclinable terms in a scientific context). In the eyes of the believer, the Shroud appears as a testimony, as a very strong and explicit reference to the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. In front of the Shroud, as in front of the sepulchral cloths which John refers to in his Gospel, we can see a *sign* that helps us to make the transition from *seeing* to *believing* ("he saw and believed").

Can you tell our readers what conclusions the group of scientists who studied the Shroud in 1978 reached?

To put it briefly, the 1978 group of scientists known as the STURP (acronym for "Shroud of Turin Research Project") came to the conclusion that the image found on the Shroud cannot be a painting, and does not appear to be the result of an artifact. It is not clear how it formed with the characteristics analyzed (extremely superficial character, the result of a process of oxidation and dehydration of the linen whose causes are not known). The image appears only on the front of the cloth (not on the back, where there are only the blood stains). The blood stain analysis gave a positive result (i.e. it is real human blood). Furthermore, where there are bloodstains there is no imprint of the image (that is, the oxidation and dehydration process that produced it has not occurred).

Did Jesus want to show the world the face of suffering? Is the face of Jesus, in an age in which we are pervaded by meaningless images, an "announcement"?

I really think so, but I would say that it is a necessity, almost a requirement of men of all times. It is true that today we are in the era of the image, of "multimedia", but basically this dimension belongs to human nature. We need to see the face. And Jesus, too, wanted to "be seen", appear, incarnate or transfigure himself again through the face and the entire body of the Shroud. This fact also corresponds to the so-called economy of the Incarnation: the Word became flesh, made himself visible, and thus, when the apostle John gives his testimony in his first letter, he will be able to say: "what we have seen with our eyes, what we have contemplated and what our hands have touched [...] we also announce it to you." Thus through the Shroud Jesus shows us how much he wanted to suffer for us, what was the price to pay for our salvation. That face tells us both how much damage our sins cause and how much greater is God's merciful love, as a response to our sin. As Saint Paul says, where sin abounded (which caused so many wounds and so much bloodshed) grace abounded all the more, that of forgiveness ("today you will be

with me in heaven", Jesus will say from the cross to the good thief), and of redemption. This is, for me, the announcement of the Face of the Shroud, also for the man of today.

What is, in terms of faith, the modernity of the Holy Shroud?

The "modernity" of the Holy Shroud, for me, is illustrated by a very successful gloss that St. John Paul II made in 1980 in his pastoral visit to Turin, in the Mass of the octave of Easter (which today we know as *Divine Mercy Sunday*). The Gospel of that day speaks of the *unbelieving apostle*, Thomas, who does not believe the other apostles who say they have seen the Risen Lord: "If I do not see... I will not believe." Jesus accepts the challenge, appears again that Sunday after Easter and offers Thomas the required proof: he presents his hands and side to him so that he can *verify*. "Look... *check*... And don't be incredulous anymore." The Pope then said in that context: "Perhaps faith is dead and has been covered by a layer of secular everyday life, or even of denial and contempt... In today's evangelical and liturgical event there is also an apostle who is incredulous and obstinate in his non-faith." Therefore, with the Shroud, in some way also today Jesus comes to meet us, to help our little faith, and he also says to us: "Look... *check*... and don't be incredulous anymore."

What does the permanent exhibition of the Shroud tell us and reveal?

The exhibition intends to present "who is the man of the Shroud", as we wanted to call it. It offers elements so that the visitor can give himself an answer. It presents a path from different perspectives (historical, scientific, forensic, iconographic, theological-biblical), through explanatory panels, but also and above all by being able to observe a very faithful replica, at full scale, of the Shroud, as well as the reproduction of some objects of the passion (the scourges, the crown of thorns, the nails), a replica of the Holy Sepulcher (scale reconstruction), a "Shroud crucifix", the work of the well-known Shroud scholar Mons. Giulio Ricci, the beautiful bronze sculpture by Prof. Luigi Mattei and the holograms of the negative of the Shroud in which the three-dimensional character of the image imprinted on the Shroud linen can be appreciated. Then we are presented with the state of the art of the studies around the Shroud, so that the visitor can get a thorough idea of the knowledge we have of it, but also can experience an encounter with a reality that speaks, as well as than to the mind of the wise, even to the heart of the believer. You can see a gallery of the images of the exhibition in this [link](#). [Google English translation of original Italian language web page].

Can you give us some information on the Postgraduate Diploma in Studies on the Holy Shroud?

This Diploma, now in its eleventh edition, offers the possibility of multidisciplinary training, at university level, to those who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Sacred Sheet for catechesis, for religion courses or for personal interest, with the help of leading experts at national and international level. The Diploma, in fact, is offered in collaboration with the International Center for Studies on the Shroud of Turin and the Diocesan Center of Sindonology in Rome. It can be followed both in person and remotely, live or deferred, via the internet. It lasts one year and is divided into two semesters. In addition to Italian, the program can also be followed in English and Spanish. You can find more information on the Diploma in this [link](#). [Google English translation of original Italian language web page].