

The Imprint

(In the obituary to Father O'Leary published on this web site recently, I commended to readers the account of the Jospice Imprint that appeared in the Silver Jubilee publication of the St. Joseph's Hospice Association. Since this publication may not be readily available to visitors to this web site, I was asked by Barrie Schwartz to submit the account for publication. I enclose the following account with the permission of St. Joseph's Hospice. The text is produced as written and the message is in the words written by Father O'Leary. Peter Carr Sherborne UK.)

The Imprint

One of the most significant happenings to have taken place in our Hospice over the past 25 years has been the phenomenon of the Jospice Imprint. It is a story worth recalling. ...

In February 1981, I received a telephone call from a noted Liverpool consultant surgeon, Mr. Robin Downie. He enquired whether or not I had a bed available for one of his patients called Les. I said that there was a vacant male bed and that I would go to Fazakerley Hospital to see him. I did so and something quite remarkable happened.

On February 27th, 1981, Les came to us. He was suffering from a carcinoma of the pancreas. His doctors had stated that there was no further treatment possible for his condition and his prognosis was very poor. They gave him only two weeks to live at the outside. In fact, his stay in the Hospice lasted only ten days.

He hailed from Bootle and was 44 years of age. By nature, a pleasant man, Les had lived a simple life, was caring in his attitude to friends and neighbours and being a single man, had a deep filial devotion to his mother Hilda. There was nothing particular which marked him out from the ordinary man in the street. He had tried his hand at many jobs and had, like so many others in a depressed Merseyside, experienced many months of unemployment. He was never one to complain

even when he became afflicted with this particularly distressing form of carcinoma. However, as the illness progressed, Les began to suffer from depression, when it became increasingly obvious that the doctors had nothing to offer him by way of a cure - or in fact could not discover any way of alleviating the nausea and listlessness from which he suffered.

When I was requested by Mr. Downie to visit Les in Fazakerley Hospital, with a view to accepting him as a patient in our Hospice, I did so willingly, not only because I had great admiration for the wonderful work of Mr. Downie, who laboured tirelessly for so many patients, but also because of the apparent hopelessness of Les' condition. That same evening, I went to see Les, with not a little trepidation - a usual experience for me when visiting a person afflicted with a serious illness. I found, to my great delight, that Les greeted me with a wonderful smile. Our meeting was

not too prolonged and I felt at ease with his smile and realised my fears were unfounded. Les was delighted to accept my invitation to come to our Hospice and most wonderful of all, I detected no sign of the depression I had been warned about. That is not to say Les was not still depressed about his condition, but the relief on his face at the prospect of coming to St.

Joseph's Hospice in Thornton, made our first meeting an uplifting experience. I came out of his hospital room a different

person - uplifted spiritually and thankful to God that He had given us a beautiful present in the person of Les.

Of course, I did not realise at that time how eventful a visit it had been, for this was the beginning of many wonderful happenings which were later to unfold.

When Les arrived at the Hospice, our nurses and staff did their utmost to make him comfortable. He asked for a Bible to read and then settled down to enjoy a bowl of jelly. I visited him shortly after his tea and was surprised to discover how well he was settling in. He remarked how pleasing it was to see such lovely trees in our garden and said how much he was looking forward to the Spring. He conveyed this same happiness to nurses and visitors alike; so much so, that many members of the nursing staff and their friends were electrified, just sitting with him and saying a few prayers. Here was a man, very ill, and, in human terms, helpless, yet he was able to

have a profound effect on all with whom he came into contact. When asked why he had come to St. Joseph's Hospice, Les said, "I've come here to meet God."

A few days after Les arrived a group of people visited the Hospice to pray with the patients. They entered Les' room and asked him if he would like them to pray with and for him. He said they could and lay on his pillows watching them.

After a while Les suddenly sat bolt upright, and looking towards the bottom of the bed, said, 'Oh my Lord, you are here. You have come for me ! But I, Les, have never done anything for you !' Then, looking at his hands, which were large for his size, he continued, 'These hands have done nothing for you, and yet you have come to me.'

We all left the room quietly, deeply moved by the spirituality of a person who himself had said that although brought up a Christian he had not taken an active part in his faith during the latter years."

On Sunday, March 8th, Holy Mass was celebrated in the Hospice lounge at 7.30 p.m. Les was present, sitting next to the table which served as an altar. I recall how pleasant it was to be able to say Holy Mass surrounded by our patients. When Mass had finished, I tried a bit of leg-pulling, by remarking how awful the singing was ! The patients countered my remarks by stating how much below par my sermon was ! "Bloody awful" some of them said. They were probably right. We always enjoyed - and still do - a little bit of banter after Mass and on this particular occasion, there

was quite a lot of laughter and noise. I turned to Les who was sitting near me, because he wasn't joining in the fun. I knew how sick he was. He was bent low in his wheelchair, until I spoke to him. "What do you think, Les ?" I said, trying to coax him into the general merriment. He lifted his head slowly and replied, "Father, I was enthralled." A silence descended on us all.

Les had followed the

action of the Holy mass carefully and was overcome by the awesomeness of the Holy Sacrifice. He obviously was enthralled. Shortly afterwards, the nurses took him back to his bedroom and settled him down for the night. Poor Les looked so ill, yet he displayed a , remarkable composure of mind and a dignity no sickness could destroy. At 5.30 a.m. the night nurse in charge, Elizabeth Lavis, altered his position and made sure that he was comfortable. At 5.55 a.m. Les died. At that point, no-one could have guessed how important Les' death was to become. When other nursing duties had been completed, Les' body was washed and prepared for the undertakers who arrived at approximately 1.00 a.m. One of the nursing staff was detailed, immediately Les' body was taken away, to wash down the bed and the mattress cover, in preparation for the admission of a new patient. She scrubbed away but found the task was taking much longer than she had first thought.

There were some difficult stains which were proving to be particularly obstinate. Scrub as she might, they seemed to be indelible. Then, all of a sudden, she discovered that the mark she was attempting to erase was in actual fact an imprint of a hand. She immediately stopped and called in other members of staff to witness what she had seen. They were all astonished. Some time later I and other members of the Management Committee of Hospice were called in to observe this unusual happening.

For safe-keeping, I folded the nylon mattress cover and took it home. There it stayed for five years, wrapped in a plastic bag. From time to time, I thought about showing this phenomenon to experts of the Holy Shroud, but these were only fleeting thoughts and were soon supplanted, by what seemed to be more urgent considerations concerning our Hospices here in England and abroad.

There were, after all, many visits to be made to our patients, financial problems to solve and the usual difficulties of running an Organisation to be tackled. However, an article on the Holy Shroud in the Catholic Herald in March 1986, made me resolve at last to show our Imprint to certain professors of forensic medicine, to see what they thought.

In 1987/8, these learned men experimented extensively and had unrestricted access to the actual nylon mattress cover. The results of their work turned out to be inconclusive. Three questions occupied my mind: What was the mark on the mattress, how did it get there and why did it happen? The far reaching problem of why it happened, would be beyond the scope of any scientist, but I had no doubt that the other two enquiries could be examined scientifically.

The experiments the scientists employed involved a wide variety of disciplines. All proved to be of no avail, despite the fact that the Imprint itself was made accessible to the best experts that could be found. They could feel it, take scrapings from it and examine the nylon texture, with the most up-to-date methods in microscopy

The Q.E.D. team from the B.B.C. went to great lengths over a period of six months to find the finest experts in the textile industry and leading figures in the medical world; again, to see if a solution could be found to the aforementioned questions, all to no avail. Also, Professor Frederick Zugibe, an accepted authority in forensic medicine in the United States and a student of the Holy Shroud for over 40 years, submitted the mattress cover to every possible test in his laboratory in New York, but finally acknowledged that to him, the Jospice Imprint was a conundrum. Professor Cameron of the London Clinic and other leading experts, were similarly left perplexed.

Then in late 1997 an explanation of how the Imprint could have been formed was sent to me by American scientist Dr. Phil Callahan. His paper used phenomena called electrets. In 1995 he had attended a conference at Thornton on the Imprint, the Shroud of Turin and the Tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and at the end I gave him a small piece of the mattress cover to use in his experiments back home at his laboratory in Florida.

A lot of time has been spent in these scientific investigations but if it makes one person believe in God, it will have been time well spent. However, perhaps one could be permitted to depart from the hard technological sophistication of scientific experiments and be allowed to use a more gentle approach, in trying to solve the conundrum of the Jospice Imprint ? The brief of science is limited to what can be experimentally, or empirically verified. Is there a place for Faith, or

some other non-scientific concept, on which to base our reasoning ?

It is interesting to note the similarities between the Holy Shroud and the Jospice Imprint. They are both imprints; the only two known to medical science. Both have images which are adsorbed on to, and not absorbed into, their respective fabrics. Both images occurred at the time of death (or resurrection). Both happened at a time of trauma.

The Jospice Imprint contains the image of the face of a man, and like the Man of the Holy Shroud it can be seen only by taking a photograph of a negative image. The story of the first photographs of the Holy Shroud is well documented. The figure on the cloth was found to be a negative image. In the case of the Jospice Imprint, a similar factor was noticed. When one examines the area of the face

on the nylon mattress cover, only the jaw area is apparent and some matted hair. When this area is photographed and developed, an ordinary positive result is obtained, as would be expected.

However, when a photograph of the negative of this photograph is taken and developed, the whole face is revealed. What is more extraordinary is that this face does not seem to be the face of the patient as we remember him ! The face, of course, was lying on two pillows, a large one and a small one. For this image to penetrate on to the mattress cover, it would, of necessity, be required to go through a pillow slip, a pillow, the under-covering of the pillow slip, through a second pillow and again through a cotton sheet to fix itself indelibly into, or through, the very thin layer of

polyurethane which lies on top of the mattress cover.

There may be many other points of similarity between these two imprints, which still have to be discovered and which would make the comparison of one with the other even more interesting.

Could it be that both images occurred in the same way ? With regard to the Holy Shroud, despite many years of research, no scientist has yet been able to offer a suitable answer in this regard. The Holy Shroud has been recently carbon-dated, to find out the age of its fabric. The three laboratories,

where the tests were carried out, came up with mediaeval dating, although many scientists today dispute the results of these experiments.

On the other hand, there is no difficulty in dating the Jospice Imprint March 1981 !

Since the Holy Shroud and the Jospice Imprint are the only two medically recorded imprints of a human body, it would not, I think, be unreasonable to suggest that the causation of one, is similar (or the same ?) as the other. Further, it would seem that both defy ordinary physical laws and are of an essence which obeys the natural laws of causation.

If these two examples of an imprint are *sui generis*, would it be pushing a point of comparison too far to say that they are not only imprints which bear comparison with so many similarities between them, but that they are imprints of one and the same person !

Obviously, people would think this type of speculation to be beyond any reasonable thought; but if it were the case and in some supernatural way, Christ did manifest Himself on the

morning of Les' death (and we know Christ lived in the first century) the dating of the Holy Shroud itself might no longer be in doubt. After all, Christ is present, crucified again in every suffering person. So, is this speculation really out of order ?

St. Paul said in his letter to the Colossians:

'I have to make up in my own body what still has to be made up by Christ on the Cross.'
All this seems, I know, to be far-fetched and stretching the bounds of reason to the ultimate, but at least it is worth a thought.

A million similarities do not make one sameness, just as a million probabilities do not make one certainty. Hence, any exercise in comparison is fraught with an untold number of pitfalls and one is left in the world of speculation only. However, the Jospice Imprint is so out of the ordinary, that it deserves a speculation or two ! What is certain is that we have here in Jospice a piece of nylon material which will keep students of the Holy Shroud occupied for many years to come. Whilst we all realise that we do not need the Holy Shroud as proof of Christ's resurrection, we may have been sent, through the Jospice Imprint, a supernatural phenomenon, which may be an aid in highlighting the veracity of the Holy Shroud and all that is implied in it, for the benefit of a very materialistic, unbelieving and cynical world.

As Hans Werfel said at the end of 'The Song of Bernadette':

"To those who believe in God
no explanation is necessary;
To those who do not believe in God
no explanation is possible."

Early in 1998 I received in the post a copy of Ian Wilson's latest book entitled 'The Blood and the Shroud.' Ian is the author of the 'Turin Shroud', the authoritative book on the Holy Shroud which is kept in the Cathedral in Turin. This new book is a very scholarly investigation of this phenomenon. I have on many occasions requested Ian's advice regarding our Imprint. He visited our Hospice on May 1 st, 1986, when I exhibited our Imprint publicly for the first time. I remember it was the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker and after Holy Mass a group of us gathered round in

wonder to look at our own mattress cover and we realised how blessed we had been. I was delighted that in this new book our mattress cover had been given a mention and that Ian had included a photograph of the hand as imprinted on it.

F.O'L.



Closeup of hand



Closeup of face



The Jospice Mattress



Les (second from left) and his family.