

Father Peter Rinaldi S.D.B. – A Tribute

David Rolfe

An occasional series of adventures with the Shroud over 45 years.



This is Father Peter as he appears in the opening scene of *The Silent Witness*. Irrespective of my adventures with the Shroud my friendship with him would have been enough to convert me. He was in every sense of the words a “Holy Man”. I have much to thank him for. Fr. Peter, who had been an altar boy in Turin cathedral, liked to tell the story that his father had initially contemplated becoming a priest but had been dissuaded by his uncle, Fr. Filippo Rinaldi, on the grounds that *‘The Lord has other plans for you!’*. Those plans turned out to be the successful rearing of twelve children, of whom five of the eight brothers became priests, and two of the four sisters’ nuns. “So”, chuckled Fr. Peter, “My uncle turned down one but got seven servants of God in return.” By the time I met Fr. Peter, his Uncle Filippo had already been beatified – an important factor in this story.

In 1976 I wrote to him out of the blue from my garret of an office in Soho’s Wardour St. to his parish in Port Chester, a suburb of New York where he had been sent decades earlier. Once there he had founded The Holy Shroud Guild of America and he was my last hope. Both UK TV channels, BBC and ITV, had turned down my proposal to make a film about the Shroud of Turin based on Ian Wilson’s research. “No one is interested in relics.” they said. Father Peter replied immediately and asked if I could come to New

York straight away. I borrowed the fare and went. I was not a churchgoer, but I was a filmmaker interested in the Shroud and that was clearly enough for Fr. Peter.

He met me at the airport and took me first to the presbytery which was the heart of the complex he had created from scratch decades earlier at the centre of the town. It included a large school, playgrounds, sports fields, a social club and community centre. He then said we would walk down to the hotel. The walk was only a few hundred meters, but it took a very long time. Almost everyone we passed was a parishioner and they all, young and old, wanted to greet him. The “love” was palpable. At the brand-new Hilton Hotel, the manager at the desk also welcomed him with open arms and Fr. Peter introduced me to him. “If this guy is a friend of yours, Fr. Peter, he is a friend of ours. He will be *our* guest.” I think you get the picture.

Two days later we boarded a plane to Milwaukee where Fr. Peter had arranged a meeting for us both with Harry John, an eccentric multimillionaire who was heir to a brewing empire. The meeting was worth a story by itself but that is for another day. Let me just say that I returned to London with a substantial down payment to start on the film and the promise of the balance when needed. Father Peter, along with his co-founder of the H.S.G., Fr Adam Otterbein C.S.S.R., would be executive producers.

Jump forward several months. The script, now finalised, required a full reconstruction of the night in 1898 when Secondo Pia photographed the Shroud for the first time. Fr. Peter had already persuaded Don Coero who presided over the Shroud’s Turin Museum to release the original plate camera. We now just needed to get permission to recreate the event with a replica Shroud in the cathedral and its chapel. The cathedral belonged to the Church, but the chapel was in the jurisdiction of the municipality which at that time was communist controlled. Permission was by no means a certainty.



The Blessed Don Filippo Rinaldi.

I went along with Fr. Peter to meet the “Dottoressa” in charge. Things did not look hopeful until she noted Fr. Peter’s surname, Rinaldi. Not an unusual one in Italy. Was he any relation to The Blessed Filippo Rinaldi? “Yes.” Replied Fr. Peter. “He is my uncle.” At this point the Dottoressa shrieked with joy. She took from her handbag a colour picture of Don Filippo (Left) and proclaimed her attachment to him and that she prayed to him every day. “What can I possibly do for you?” she said.

Not only did she grant permission but provided two uniformed carabinieri along with the ceremonial drapes that only came out for rare ceremonial occasions such as the marriage of a senior member of the Savoy family which had been the occasion of the photography in 1898.



Thank you, Fr. Peter, for everything you did for me and, of course, the love of your life, the Shroud of Turin. We will bring it justice. DR.

BSTS Team

Editor: David Rolfe, **Circulation:** Brenda and Stuart Benton,
Distribution: Philippa Foster, **Treasurer:** Rev. Phil Moon.

Vacancy for P.R/Publicist, Legal Advisor, Fund-Raiser.

Thank you to all our subscribers.
BSTSNewsletter.com