

# **"I'll explain the 'radical solidarity' of the Shroud"**

**Interview by Paola Mastropasqua**

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Today is Holy Saturday, the day of silence. A stone covers the sepulcher, the Master is dead.

The questions are chasing each other: and its promises? Does it all end here, in dismay at a gory farewell? The heart is in turmoil. But Saturday is not only this, it is also expected in fear. Suspension between death and resurrection. It is training of hope. And its icon is the Shroud that "testifies precisely that unique and unrepeatable interval in the history of humanity and the universe, in which God, in Jesus Christ, shared not only our dying, but also our remaining in death. The most radical solidarity," wrote Benedict XVI.

And today more than ever we yearn for this solidarity, this closeness to God. Perhaps also for this reason, from 17.00 in the afternoon a virtual pilgrimage to Turin will be possible to contemplate the Sacred Cloth. What does this object tell us about which so many scientists, believers and non-believers, have been dwelling for years?

We interviewed Dr. Girolamo Spagnoletti, MD, PhD, Surgeon and specialist in Shroud Studies, to answer some questions about the mystery that accompanies the Cloth, to understand its specificity from a scientific point of view and its size in the eyes of faith.

***How did the Shroud come down to us? For those who have never seen it, can you give us a description?***

The Shroud is a herringbone linen fabric measuring approximately  $4.41 \times 1.12$  meters, containing the double image of a man. Both the textile fiber used, and the processing method, and its measures corresponding precisely to  $8 \times 2$  Syrian cubits tell of a Middle Eastern origin, of a Jewish environment, and of funeral rituals of the first century. The first historical source on the Shroud dates back to 1353, when the knight Goffredo di Charny had a church built in Lirey (France), to guard the Sacred Linen. The analysis of the pollens present on the cloth confirms that it has been exposed in Palestine, Edessa and Constantinople. How it came from Constantinople to France is not known. I can only speculate that a knight rescued her during the siege of Constantinople in 1204 and brought it to Europe.

***Can we scientifically exclude it is a fake, for example, the work of an artist?***

It is extremely difficult, with today's scientific knowledge, to hypothesize that it is the work of an artist. The image on the Shroud does not contain any pigment, neither organic nor inorganic, and the most sophisticated current techniques do not allow to reproduce a similar image in detail. Thinking about a medieval artist with more advanced knowledge than ours seems to me at least bold. From here to conclude that the Shroud is the sheet that enveloped Christ passes by. "There is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadow for those who do not want to believe."

***In front of the Shroud, do we need more reason or more faith?***

Why choose between the two? "Faith and reason are like the two wings with which the human spirit rises towards the contemplation of the truth". "Faith if not if it is not thought of, it is nothing." Even before the Shroud of Turin, faith and reason go hand in hand. However, I often repeat from my perspective as a man of science, in my experience with the Shroud it was above all the reason that guided me. The difficulties that my reason should face and resolve, if the Shroud were a fake, would be many more than the difficulties that, in the same situation, my faith would face, which does not depend on the Shroud. Atheists and believers of other religions, with few ideologized exceptions, study the linen with the same attention with which we study it. The Shroud is a fact. And question everyone's reason.

***Are there any details on the sheet that can be attributed exclusively to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth?***

If I start from the assumption that the image on the Shroud is really the imprint of a corpse, I do not know in history any other case of a condemned to death who has been scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified, pierced in the side, wrapped in a burial sheet, etc., etc. Many have ventured on the path of calculating probabilities. A statistical analysis, which I like because it provides an easily understandable result and which took into consideration 8 aspects of the cloth, 9 characteristics of the microparticles on the fabric, 14 characteristics of the blood, 16 hypotheses on the production of the image, 3 elements on the others images on the sheet, 20 elements relating to the "man of the Shroud", 12 historical events and 18 analogies between "man of the Shroud" and evangelical narratives, concluded that it is more likely that the same number will come out at the roulette 116 times in a row rather than the "man of the Shroud" is not Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it is still not enough for those who do not want to believe.

***If the Shroud is the shroud of a dead man, why would Christians experience resurrection?***

Shroud and Sudarium are two distinct components of the Jewish funeral clothing and we must not confuse them. Many elements support that Linen was in contact with a truly dead man, first of all the post-mortem blood mark on the side. However, there are also clues to the Resurrection. I call them "clues" because the Resurrection cannot be "tried". The absence of smudges and breaks of the blood traces, the absence of signs of decomposition, the temporal calculations of fibrinolysis and rigor mortis, a careful reading of John's chapter 20 confirm that, after a time of about 40 hours, the Body separated from the sheet without opening it.

***Is it possible that a corpse leaves a print similar to that of the Shroud on a fabric? Through what scientific process could it happen?***

I have not known in history any other case of corpse that has left a shroud-like image in its funeral cloth. If anyone knew scientifically how the image of the Shroud occurred, he would have answered the Question of the questions. But God loves to hide in the contrast of light and dark. He awaits our free response of love. If we were forced to adhere to him by the evidence of science, ours would not be love. Among the dozens of advanced hypotheses, the most accredited among scholars are the hypotheses with radiation. It is difficult to experimentally obtain visible results because voltages are needed up to millions of volts. The idea that the Resurrection was accompanied by an energetic flash, perhaps even a bright one,

fascinates us and introduces us to contemplation. We look at the Shroud not only as documentation of the signs of the Passion, not only as custodian of the body that died on Holy Saturday, but also as the first witness of the Resurrection.