

Restoration of Shroud of Turin Is Completed

Patches and Additions Removed

TURIN, Italy, SEPT. 22, 2002 (Zenit.org).- The figure of the crucified man imprinted on the Shroud of Turin can now be more clearly seen, following its restoration by experts.

At the official presentation of the restored shroud Saturday, Cardinal Severino Poletto, archbishop of Turin, explained that the purpose of the work was to guarantee the conservation of the cloth. The work involved the removal of patches sewn on the shroud 470 years ago.

The cardinal, who is the relic's pontifical custodian, said that the restoration was carried out with the permission of the Holy See (which owns the shroud), and in keeping with the advice of technical experts.

The restoration of the shroud, in which according to tradition the body of Christ was wrapped after the crucifixion, was carried out last June and July in the sacristy of the Turin cathedral. Work was done by a team headed by Swiss expert Mechtild Flury-Lemberg, former director of the Abegg Museum in Berne.

Thirty triangular patches, sewn by nuns of Chambéry, France, in 1534, after a fire damaged the relic in 1532, were removed from the shroud.

Also removed was the "Holland cloth" sewn on the reverse of the shroud 450 years ago to preserve it. The work also enabled the removal of dust and debris that had accumulated on the cloth over the centuries. All the material removed has been catalogued and placed in safekeeping.

During the 1978 exposition of the relic, pilgrims read a sign stating: "Do not pay attention to the dark side borders." It was already evident at that time that the patches and Holland cloth made it difficult to recognize the figure of the crucified man that has remained mysteriously imprinted on the linen.

This sign is no longer necessary. The restoration makes it easier to recognize this image, which has undergone changes, since the holes the patches covered are now visible.

Cardinal Poletto said the shroud must not become a source of conflict, division or controversy, but a point of reference for deeper reflection and prayer.

He expressed the hope that Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II and John Paul II will be able to meet in Turin and pray together before the shroud. A great devotion to the shroud exists in Russia.

The shroud, measuring 4.39 meters in length and 1.15 meters in width (14.5 feet by 3.5 feet), has now been placed in a climate-controlled urn. The chapel of the Turin cathedral where the shroud is kept is constantly under surveillance.

The restoration resulted in a lot of digital information. For the first time, both sides of the Shroud of Turin have been reproduced on computers.

Cardinal Poletto said a dossier will be sent to the Vatican, which could then call for further scientific studies of the shroud.

There is historical evidence of the shroud's existence since the 14th century, although some historians say they can document its presence earlier, with stages in Jerusalem, Odessa, Constantinople and Athens.

A 1988 carbon-14 study, carried out in laboratories of Oxford, England; Tucson, Arizona; and Zurich, Switzerland, concluded that the shroud was made in the Middle Ages. Numerous scientists, however, challenged this result.

The Catholic Church has made no pronouncements on its origin. When John Paul II visited the relic in May 1998, he said: "As it is not a matter of faith, the Church has no specific competence to pronounce itself on these questions. It entrusts the task of research to scientists, to arrive at appropriate answers for questions related to this cloth."

"What really counts for believers is that the holy shroud is a mirror of the Gospel," the Holy Father explained, emphasizing that there is a convergence between the Gospel narrative and the image of the man on the cloth.

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