



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Easter Day 2025

Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43, Ps 117, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20: 1-9

In a glass fronted case, suspended over the altar in the Cathedral Church of St John the Baptist, Turin is a length of cloth, approximately fourteen foot long by three and a half foot wide which is at the centre of an unending debate and scientific and religious controversy.

The cloth has hung there since 1578 when the House of Savoy transferred their seat of power to that city from Chambery. The three strand herringbone twill of flax fibrils with its mysterious markings had first emerged into its modern history in the town of Lirey in northern France where it began to be exhibited in 1354 and was subsequently denounced in 1389 by the Bishop of Troyes as a forgery. Before that its whereabouts are unknown.

There is patchy historical evidence tracing the shroud back to the first century AD, describing how a cloth bearing the image was sent from Israel to Edessa in Turkey and taken from there to Constantinople in 944 AD. The shroud was stolen from Constantinople during the fourth Crusade (1201-1204), possibly by the Knights Templar (it was rumoured they venerated an image on a cloth), and brought to Europe.

The Shroud of Turin, as it is known, is widely regarded by the religious as the likely burial cloth of the Crucified Christ. By sceptics as a remarkable medieval forgery.

Over this length of ancient cloth, much ink has been spilt both within and without the Universal Church.

Carbon dating, permitted by Pope St John Paul II, seemed to support the initial verdict of the 14th C Bishop of Troyes i.e. it was a clever fake. The dating suggested 14th Century origin.

However, because of the fire damage caused in the early 15th century and the 'modern' repair, much subsequent dispute has centred on the corruption of the evidence.

Enquirers have concluded, at the most reductionist, that the spots are some kind of red ochre paint. At its most glorious that they are blood splatters from the body wrapped therein.

Even the most super-scientific sceptic struggles, however, to explain why such a forgery should be so understated and its true depth and significance should have waited upon the discovery and advancement of 19th century photography to reveal the extraordinary detail and correspondence to the wounded corpus of Jesus described in the Gospels. Nor can anyone, fakers or faithful, yet account for this amazing transference of 3 D image onto this ancient cloth.

If it is genuine then we know only that some remarkable process occurred in the disappearance of the body while leaving a perfect 'still shot' of the corpus.

In the [latest study](#) by Liberato de Cato and others, researchers from Italy's Institute of Crystallography applied a wide-angle X-ray scattering technique to study the shroud. This method analyses the natural ageing of flax cellulose to uncover details of the linen's structure and breakdown over time, allowing construction of a timeline from the fabric's manufacture. This analysis dates the shroud's origin to the first century AD, supporting its authenticity. The researchers also found that the data profiles of the shroud were consistent with the profiles of Israeli linens from the period 55 – 74 AD. But when the shroud was compared with linens from the medieval period (1260-1390 AD) no similarity was found.

Why does this matter? Let us follow the 'faithful' the whole way and say YES – this is a record of a crucified man. YES it dates from the time of JESUS. YES it is almost certainly His grave clothes recorded by the Gospellers. YES something did happen to the vanished body.

We might also pause before the Gospel witness of St John himself who, according to his own account, saw something in the empty tomb which brought him instantly to believe. There were only the grave clothes to be seen so we may assume that there was something utterly convincing that brought the Apostle to belief in the Resurrection which, heretofore, had been a real puzzle.

BUT, even if we say YES to all those givens there is one remaining step. We already know that Jesus died. We already know the pattern of His wounds. We already know that His Body was mysteriously missing – by whatever means.

For all this exciting weight of growing evidence we still need to know that the shroud is the prelude to or the evidence of the Resurrection.

And here Christ Himself and His Body the Church come to our aid. In providing the sacramental life Jesus, through His Church, assures us of His Risen Presence. We are able to have a relationship with Him because He is Risen from the dead.

When evangelicals talk cheerily about 'knowing Jesus' because of some moment of profound emotional encounter, they are merely expressing one aspect of that relationship with the Risen Lord, And this is terribly dependent upon the emotional disposition of the believer and the zeitgeist of his culture and community. For Catholics, knowing Jesus, crucified, risen, ascended and glorified is vouchsafed to us in its totality, in the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Encounter on the Emmaus Road, the appearance and spirit pouring of the upper room and the scarcely conceivable miracle of the Galilee shoreline and the recommitment of the Prince of Apostles and the blinding light on the Damascus Road that will bring the great evangelist onside, salvation history, in its totality, comes together with the here and now. Jesus is truly present. That is both the 'HOW' and the 'WHY' of the

mystery The image on the shroud is of the dead man. We are here because we have witnessed that He is alive. We are here because the scourge of our mortality is healed and that, attendant upon our triumphal and sovereign Lord, we are an Easter People and Hallelujah is our song.

Praise God with a joyful heart. He is Risen and Man is no longer in thrall to sin and death. In Him we are loosed from the chains of our mortality and become instead the children of eternity.

CHRIST IS RISEN HALLELUJAH