

The Shroud of Turin is kept in the royal chapel in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin, located in northern Italy. It measures 14.3 feet by 3.7 feet, and is a 3:1 herringbone weave of linen - the same weave used in most bluejeans today. It's prominent feature is a faint brownish image of a man - front and back ... with his hands crossed in front.

The Shroud's history is mostly speculation prior to the late 14th century. From the 15th century on, its history is well documented. In 1578, it was brought from France to Turin, and has remained there ever since.

The Vatican has made no definitive ruling on the Shroud, but rather in personal opinions over the years, many popes have referred to it as a devotional piece or an icon.

In 1898, the first photograph of the Shroud was taken, and the black-and-white negative showed details previously unnoticed. Medical and scientific analyses made over the past century fall on either side of declaring authenticity. That is, the Shroud - like the Gospel message itself - convinces some, but not all.

A forensic analysis of the Shroud (and I've put up a little display in the entrance to the church) shows that apart from the wounds in the hands and feet ... and the spear wound in the right side; the figure on the shroud has over 30 puncture wounds on the head (the 'crown of thorns' was more like a 'helmet of thorns' with 1" spines poking in at all angles); 120 wounds across the torso, legs, and arms from the scourging ... forty lashes with whips with three lashes tipped with barbell-shaped metal weights; large abrasions across the shoulders (from carrying the cross, or the crossbeam); swellings of both eyes, a rip in one eyelid, a broken nose, and a fat lip (from being beat up by the soldiers); there are also abrasions on both the knees and the face (from falling with his hands bound to a crossbeam.) The cruelty of all this is shocking.

This Sunday, we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This feast commemorates the historic discovery of the site of the crucifixion of Jesus by St. Helena in the year 326. As recounted by St. Ambrose, "*she worshiped not the wood, but the King, Him who hung on the wood.*"

In the First Reading, we hear of the Old Testament episode in the desert when the Israelites were grumbling against God. A plague of seraph serpents is sent to punish them. They are bitten, they get sick, and they die. At their prayers, God provides a remedy. But the cure is not an anti-venom ... nor is it

a medicine made from herbs ... rather Moses makes a bronze serpent, places it on a pole, and the people are to look at it, contemplate it - that is recognize that their sin brought this punishment - and then they will be healed.

In the Gospel, Jesus refers to this same passage in His discourse with Nicodemus. Jesus tells him that, *“just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”*

In this regard, it would be futile to contemplate an empty cross. Rather, we look at Him whom we have pierced by our sins. The cure for our shortcomings, failures, and sufferings ... the remedy for our sins ... is to gaze upon Jesus ... hanging on the cross ... contemplate how *“he emptied himself ... [and] humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.”*

Jesus did not go through His Passion for dramatic effect ... nor did He do it to prove a point. Rather,

*... God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.*

This verse is the ‘famous’ John 3:16 ... that graces football and soccer stands.

Jesus Christ died for sinners - and not just a nebulous group out there in the ether.

Jesus died for you ... and you ... and you ... and me.

And if He had to do it all over again for one of us ... He would.

Such is the Love God has for us ... such is the desire God has for us to spend eternity with Him.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us look at Him ... gaze upon Him ... with all the abrasions, the contusions ... the punctures and the bruises ... His blood, His sweat, and His tears ... Let us contemplate His Divine purpose - and remind yourself ... say to yourself: “Jesus died for me.” Realize it, recognize it, and believe it ... and then, through His love, His grace, and His mercy ... be healed of sin and your suffering ... all through the power of His Cross ... worship not the wood ... but Jesus ... Christ our King ... and be made whole.