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Embargoed till SUNDAY 17 January 2021, 11 am Rome time

Basilica of the Volto Santo
Manoppello, Sunday, January 17, 2021

Dear brothers in the priestly ministry,
dear representatives of the civil authorities,
dear sisters and brothers in the Lord.

“As [John] watched Jesus walk by, he said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God,’” we heard earlier in the Gospel. We can also say the same words here with John the Evangelist every day in view of the face of Christ in the Volto Santo.

Omnis terra is the name of today’s Sunday in the liturgical calendar, after the Latin words of Psalm 65 at the beginning of this Holy Mass: *Omnis terra adoret te, Deus, et psallat tibi!* That means in English, “Let all the earth worship you and praise you, o God; may it sing in praise of your name.” We have gathered here today, too, for this ancient praise of God by all the earth, in the Pontifical Basilica of the Volto Santo.

The occasion for this feast day is the memory of the same Sunday of the year 1208, when Pope Innocent III carried this true image of the Lord, which we see and venerate here above the main altar, as humbly as a mendicant monk from the old Basilica of St. Peter in Rome to the sick of the capital, as well as the sick pilgrims from all over Europe, to the nearby Hospital of the Holy Spirit. The most powerful and power-conscious pope of the Middle Ages brought the archetype of the merciful God barefoot to the sick and dying!

Before that, this precious veil icon had been kept hidden for a long time. With this step, the image came out into the open and became publicly known for the first time in the entire Catholic universal Church — on this Sunday in winter, which even then, in January 1208, began with the same words from the psalm as today: *omnis terra*.

But that Pope Innocent III at that time carried the holy face, together with his canons, not to the scholars and nobles of the city, but to the sick and the poor of Rome, we must

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especially remember today, January 17, 2021, when the expression *omnis terra* — “all the earth” — has taken on a startling reality as perhaps never before! For all the world is suddenly threatened by an invisible virus, all continents, all skin colors, nations and religions — truly all the people of this earth, young and old! All the world suddenly fears disease and death together, from Tierra del Fuego to Vladivostok. When was the expression *omnis terra* ever more timely and burning!

Therefore, it was for me a sacred duty as well as a great joy to come today, despite all the coronavirus obstacles, from Rome to Manoppello, where at present no pilgrims can come because of the pandemic. I had to come to bring the Volto Santo, at least through the medium of the moving images of television, to as many sick and lonely people as possible!

That is why I now also remember with gratitude the day five years ago today when Fr. Carmine Cucinelli invited me and the memorable Archbishop Edmund Farhat from Lebanon to celebrate the divine mysteries with a copy of the Volto Santo in the Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia in Rome on January 17, 2016. For Father Carmine, as rector of the Basilica in Manoppello at that time, had come up with the idea of introducing a third annual feast for the veneration of the Volto Santo during the “Jubilee of Mercy” that Pope Francis had proclaimed for the year 2016. And the Sunday *omnis terra*, in memory of the pioneering initiative of Innocent III in the distant year 1208, was simply the most suitable for this.

But I also remember, as if it were yesterday, how I was able to accompany Pope Benedict XVI on his “private pilgrimage” here on September 1, 2006, when he had decided, despite some resistance, to visit and venerate the Volto Santo in Manoppello as the first Pope in over 400 years, shortly before visiting his Bavarian homeland. And now it seems to me almost like divine providence that at that time he had chosen the same passage from the Gospel of John that we have just heard, in order to put into the following words [his thoughts on this historic encounter](#) before the faithful gathered here with the holy veil:

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During my pause for prayer just now, I was thinking of the first two Apostles who, urged by John the Baptist, followed Jesus to the banks of the Jordan River [···]. The Evangelist recounts that Jesus turned around and asked them: “What do you seek?” And they answered him, “Rabbi [···] where are you staying?” And he said to them, “Come and see.” That very same day, the two who were following him had an unforgettable experience which prompted them to say: “We have found the Messiah.” The One whom a few hours earlier they had thought of as a simple “rabbi” had acquired a very precise identity: the identity of Christ who had been awaited for centuries. But, in fact, what a long journey still lay ahead of those disciples! They could not even imagine how profound the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth could be or how unfathomable, inscrutable, his “Face” would prove, so that even after living with Jesus for three years, Philip, who was one of them, was to hear him say at the Last Supper: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?” And then the words that sum up the novelty of Jesus’ revelation: “He who has seen me has seen the Father.”

Thus far Benedict XVI on September 1, 2006.

If we take his word, and this word of the Lord, quite seriously, we see the Father also here, where the Son reveals his essence to us forever, and where we see: He lives – as Savior and Redeemer.

Pope Benedict had not come barefoot like Pope Innocent, but by helicopter from Castel Gandolfo to Manoppello at the invitation of Archbishop Bruno Forte, and I still remember very vividly every moment of that meeting, as well as May 15, 2009, when Benedict XVI visited the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, from which the veil of the Volto Santo — as well as the Shroud of Turin — originates as incomparable news of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It cannot be otherwise. After the spectacular visit of Pope Paul VI on January 4, 1964, the empty tomb of Christ in Jerusalem has also been visited by Pope John Paul II in March 2000 and Pope Francis in May 2014. Benedict XVI’s pilgrimage to Manoppello on September 1, 2006, on the other hand, can only be compared to the procession through which Pope Innocent III made known the “True Icon,” popularly known as “Veronica,” in Western Christendom more than 800 years

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ago. Pope Benedict, however, on September 1, 2006, brought the personal and “human face of God” back to the Church and to all the world. He came all alone and not in the entourage of his advisors or the canons of Saint Peter. And he came shyly and reservedly, as is his way, and only for contemplation and prayer. A celebration of the Eucharist or a public blessing with the Volto Santo was not thought of at that time. But then thousands of pilgrims followed him here, who in his footsteps carried the sentence from the Gospel of John around the whole world: “Come and see!”

Church history will record this forever. And for this, the civil authorities of the city of Manoppello already gave him the keys of your City at the Vatican on November 3, 2010, in the presence of Archbishop Bruno Forte. For this I thank you again with all my heart, as well as all the friars of the Capuchin Order and all the citizens of Manoppello, and today I thank you again especially and personally for the precious privilege of celebrating the Holy Eucharist here with you for all the sick and suffering of all the earth, under the merciful gaze of Christ: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world!”

Amen.

Archbishop Georg Gänswein

Prefect of the Papal Household

January 17, 2021