

## **Holy Sudarium from the Holy Sepulchre**

by

Paul Badde

Miechów, Poland, Sunday, September 13

Volto Santo of Manoppello is the sacred sweat-cloth (or Sudarium) from the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It is a piece of very thin fabric used to cover the faces of the deceased in the Jewish burial culture. On Christ's Sudarium, however, the face of Jesus is visible on a transparent fabric with no traces of any colour or blood.

At the Christ's tomb in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the same Gospel is read anew every morning, which is indispensable for the understanding of this "true image". "Early in the morning, while it was still dark," Mary Magdalene discovered that the tomb was empty, that is, the moment when a thin, bright beam of light heralded a new day over the Mount of Olives. It is impossible to describe this moment more precisely.

45 minutes later, the apostles Peter and John were at the tomb. Meanwhile, the sun was up in the eastern sky, facing the entrance to the tomb. "John leaned forward" - and then - "he saw the linen bandages, but he did not go inside". He had to bend down. The entrance was low. And in the dark, he saw only a long, empty sheet on the stone bench on the right, and there was no body there anymore. While Jesus hung on the cross, John was standing under it and witnessed a legionnaire pierce Jesus' side with a spear. He knew Jesus had died. So, it was the tomb in front of which he stood. But in Judaism, graves are ritually extremely unclean. A law-abiding Jew would not just walk in. "Then came Simon Peter, who was following him, and entered the tomb." Two

nights earlier, Peter had denied Jesus three times, at the hour of his greatest suffering. Now, he went straight inside the tomb. “He saw the linen bandages and the scarf that had been on Jesus' head. However, it was not lying with bandages, but curled next to it, in a special place”. It lay on the ground, to the left of the stone bench. Apart from that, there is no “special place” in this little room. But down here, behind the entrance, is the only place the morning sun was able to reach.

That is why the sea silk scarf caught his attention - something on the ground was shimmering in the sun. Peter picked it up and exposed it to the morning light. Then he saw what we see in Manoppello today - and he was sure, “I know this man!” Christ himself looked at him from the scarf there and said, “I am who I am and I live”. The tomb had become a place of transformation! All of this is summarised by the sentence which reads: “The second disciple, who came first to the tomb, also went inside. He saw and believed.”

This sentence can be understood only through the Sudarium. Jesus had risen from the dead! the scarf uttered all at once. If Christ had not shown his face in the tomb at that moment, Peter and John would not have saved the long shroud worshipped in Turin, which describes the Lord's Passion in detail like a script.

However, like in the case of these two images, we must picture the liturgy as a zero-hour memory disk. Until 1969, altars in Catholic churches were not seen as tables, but as replicas of the stone bench from Christ's rock tomb in Jerusalem, where He was brought back to life from the dead. In the old missals, therefore, the long tablecloth on the altar was called “sindon” (like Santa Sindone of Turin) and the corporal – “sudarium”. The corporal is that starched handkerchief which could only be touched by an old rite priest with his thumb and forefinger after it had come into contact with the transformed forms of bread and wine on the altar. On the altar, the corporal replaces Sudarium, which appears

first in the Gospel and then in a sixth-century Georgian manuscript, which says that Mary always carried this scarf with her after Christ's Ascension to pray before it - and that the apostles finally placed the same Sudarium on Mary's face, carrying her to the tomb when she fell asleep. Not only did the Manoppello Scarf witness the first breath of the Risen One in the Tomb of Christ, but it also witnessed the first glance of the Mother of God raised from the dead in the Tomb of Mary.