

ON THE CROSS JESUS DRAWS ALL TO HIMSELF
“When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all to myself.”
John 12: 23

When Jesus lived two thousand years ago there were no cameras, no Smart phones, no Tablets whereby people could take his picture so that future generations would know what he looked like. In today’s gospel some Greeks approach his apostles and say, “We would like to see Jesus.” Wouldn’t you like to see Jesus? Wouldn’t you ask to see Jesus if you thought that was possible? I certainly would.

Why do we take so many pictures? Why so many selfies? The picture in some fashion captures something of who we are. What we look like. Where we live. What we do. What we stand for. All of that is important. None of us ever saw Jesus in the flesh but we have seen various pictures, mostly paintings, and they help us to have some idea of what he looked like. But there is another source of information about what Jesus looked like. It is called the Shroud, the Shroud of Turin because Turin, Italy is where it is. The shroud, we believe is the long cloth that Jesus was wrapped in when they took him down from the cross.

I have never seen the shroud myself but I know people who have seen it. There is this faint outline of a human body both front and back on that shroud. You can just make out some faint features, blood stains, nail marks, wounds. But very faint. What you see are the imprint of a man who died by crucifixion a long time ago. And that was all anybody could see for 1900 years. And then in 1898 for the first time the Pope gave permission for the Shroud to be photographed. This was before digital pictures. The pictures in those days looked almost like X-rays today and the imprint on the film was then developed, subjected to a chemical process, which would capture the color and features of what was photographed.

Except. Except when this picture was taken instead of seeing a negative image on the film there was a positive image and for the first time this person’s face emerged and you could see much more clearly his whole body front and back with great clarity after almost two thousand years. Last week I was in the Holy Land, up in the Galilee where Jesus lived and began his teaching and healing ministry. Then down to Jerusalem where he confronted the corrupt religious leaders of his day and was executed by crucifixion. I went to the place where he was crucified. I went to the place where they lay his body when they took him down from the cross. I went into the tomb where they lay his body and placed my hands right there. And it made me cry. Instantly. And I cried at Calvary too. It is very moving.

Our little group of pilgrims did the Stations of the Cross right where he actually carried his cross. We know where Pontius Pilate’s Garrison was and where he faced the crowd and washed his hands of Jesus’ blood. We traced Jesus steps as best we could through the old city of Jerusalem to the church of the Holy Sepulchre which now has within it both Calvary and the tomb itself. They are in pretty close proximity.

While in Jerusalem I witnessed a display on the shroud of Turin and learned why there is growing acceptance especially in the scientific community that it is authentic. NASA has gotten involved as well as scientists from around the world and with computer spectrography and computerized magnification, they can now see things on and in the shroud that they could never see before. One of the things they have done is to create a holograph of the shroud, a three-dimensional view of the shroud whereby they can turn it and look at it from all angles. Then they created a holograph from the computerized image. They then created a mold from the holograph and then they created a form and they cast a bronze likeness of the person on the shroud in 3 Dimensions.

I was blessed to see the bronze likeness of that person whom we believe to be Jesus. But you could see the whip marks and the wounds in hands and feet and the lance thrust into his side. I have a picture on display in the sanctuary if you would like to look at it after Mass. It is the Jesus who died that you see. The grain of wheat that has fallen to the earth and died but which now begins to grow, breaks forth into life and brings Jesus forth from that tomb fully alive and transformed.

The Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus cried out, was heard, learned obedience, suffered, was purified and made perfect and then became the source of our salvation. In this picture you will get an idea of what Jesus looked like. But more than that. When you come to Mass and celebrate the Eucharist and receive Holy Communion you do not see Jesus but you experience him, you feel his presence, you open your heart to him and you welcome him and speak to him. Jesus is real. That is what our faith tells us. But we must come to be fed, come to his house, come to his table, be fed by his love, his body and blood which he gave up for you and me. There is no substitute for encountering the risen Jesus. This is what he looked like once upon a time. But this is who He is now and forever.