

REPORT OF THE CLARE NUNS OF CHAMBERY WHO MENDED THE SHROUD IN 1534

from the book: *Le Saint Suaire de Chambéry à Sainte-Claire-en-Ville (Avril-Mai 1534)*,
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1. Delivery of the Shroud to the Clare Nuns.

On Wednesday, April 15, the 1534 the Most Serene Duke of Savoy Charles III and the Legate Mgr Louis de Gorrevod, before the Vespers, sent us Mr Vesperis, treasurer of the Sainte Chapelle, together with some other canons, in order to inform us to be ready to receive the most saint Shroud they had to bring us so that we could mend it where the fire had burnt it.

Our Reverend Mother Abbess, Louise de Vargin, after thanking them, sent to answer, on behalf of all the Community, that we were ready to obey His Highness and the Legate's orders, although we felt unworthy of having been entrusted such a holy task. Therefore, the choir was adorned as well as we could, and there, after the Vespers, they carried the table on which they used to lay the holy Relic.

The following day, Thursday, April 16, towards the eight in the morning, while all the bells were ringing, a general procession was made, in which Monsignor Legate carried the holy Shroud, followed by His Highness, Monsignor Bishop of Belley and Monsignor Suffragan, besides the apostolic notary, several canons and ecclesiastics and the main nobles of the country. After having put the Shroud on the high altar of our church for a short time, they carried it into the choir, on the table that had been prepared to spread the Shroud on it. We received it in procession, with lit candles. They spread it on the table in order to examine the parts to be mended. Meanwhile, Monsignor Legate asked to all the counts and barons who were present if it was the same Shroud they had seen on the previous occasions, and they, after diligently examining it on one side and on the other, testified that it was the same one. The apostolic notary took note of it, while those were replaced by other nobles, ecclesiastics and priests, who were asked in the same way. After that, Monsignor Legate told our Reverend Mother to choose some of her nuns to mend it. She offered herself with three others, whom she designated for the task, then all four gave their names to the notary, in the presence of all the nobles. Monsignor Legate threatened the major excommunication against those who would have touched it, except the four chosen nuns. Then, the ordinary preacher of His Highness delivered a beautiful Sermon on the holy Shroud in front of the choir grill, which was opened wide. The preacher was turned on the people's side and, at the end of the speech, he read the apostolic Breve His Holiness had sent His Highness, by which he allowed the poor daughters of the Saint Clare's Rule of Chambéry to repair it. The crowd who had rushed to see the precious Relic was so great that you could hardly turn.

After the reading of the Breve, Monsignor Legate exhorted us to take the utmost care of it, and to pray God that he could grant us the grace to complete this holy deed according his holy will. After having us say the "Confiteor", he gave us all the absolution. Everybody withdrew, except the Treasurer and the canon Lambert, who had had the care of the Holy Shroud by His Highness.

In the afternoon, the embroiderer carried the wood of the frame to fix the Holland cloth, on which the Holy Shroud had to be put. After the two hours of fixing the Holland cloth on the loom and the ties, we spread the precious Holy Shroud on it and sewed it all around with "*faux filet*".

His Highness came with the Legate and a lot of priests, canons and nobles, before we had begun to put pieces of the corporals in the areas damaged by the fire; he asked our opinion on this Relic, but all we shared his, because we thought it the most reasonable.

There was such a crowd at our grill while we worked that we could not do much, and this forced Mr Audinet, His Highness' Chamber Master, to ask the canon Lambert to go out often in order to make them withdraw, beyond the guards, put there to prevent disorders.

When His Highness knew that there was such a large flow of people that there was no day without more than a thousand people (...), he took the grill key, which, however, he gave back to his Chamber Master in order to satisfy the holy wish of a great number of pilgrims, who came from Rome, Jerusalem and many other countries far away. The Holy Shroud was shown with many lit candles, while we sang kneeling. The peoples cried "mercy" loud and with devotion feelings, that could not be expressed, and went back extremely comforted, saying that it was the same Shroud they had seen in other occasions.

Since the first day they brought us the Shroud, Thursday, April 16, between seven and eight in the evening, they sent us many nobles, who, after greeting the Reverend Mother and all the Community, told her they had been ordered to put guards in front of our grill in order to stay up during the night at the holy Shroud and, although His Highness trusted us, he did it out of the proper respect for this sacred pledge of Our Saviour, and in order to avoid any kind of incidents. As a lot of foreigners had come to see the Shroud, they executed the order and then let the grill curtain be opened.

Mr. Mayor also carried other nobles so that they could stay up, too.

In the meantime, we always kept a big lit candle on a plate in front of the Relic, where four guards assisted, holding lit candles and alternating, with such a great modesty that they were more similar to novices of a Congregation, and a reformed one, than to laymen. Our Vicar Mother thanked them because they did not give any trouble and they answered her that His Highness had ordered this way. They insisted many times on our going to rest a little, except three or four of us, that could have stayed up late by this holy object, but we could not part with it and had obtained the permission from our Reverend Mother to remain there as long as we wished. If some sisters retired at about ten or eleven, they got up at midnight and all attended the matins; the others went to rest from two to four and many of us stayed up even all night with an incredible joy. All our conversations were with God.

2. Description of what can be seen on the Shroud.

We let our look go up and down through all the bleeding wounds of his holy body, whose prints appeared on this holy Shroud; it seemed to us as if the side opening, as the most significant opening of the heart, said these words incessantly to us: "O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus" ("All ye that pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow").

In fact, on this small picture, we saw sufferings that could never be imagined. We also saw on it the traces of a face all bruised and all tortured by blows, his divine head pierced by big thorns, from which blood rills came out and bled onto the forehead and divided in various rills covering the forehead with the most precious purple of the world.

On the left side of the forehead we noticed one greater and longer drop than the others, which winds like a wave. His eyebrows looked very delineated, his eyes a little less. His nose, as the most prominent part of the face, is very marked. His mouth is well put and rather small. The swollen and

disfigured cheeks let us guess perceive they have been cruelly hit, and, particularly, the right one. His beard is neither long nor too small, in the style of Nazarenes; it looks sparse in some areas, because it had been partially pulled away out of contempt, and the blood had stuck the rest.

Then we saw a long trace coming down the neck, which made us think that he had been bound with an iron chain during the capture in the Garden of Gethsemane, since the neck looks swollen in various points as if it had been pulled and shaken. The bruises and the scourge blows on the stomach are so thick that a pinhead-large zone free from blows could hardly be found. The scourge blows inter-crossed continuously and extended all along the body as far as the feet tips; the large blood clot marks the feet opening. On the left hand side, which is very marked and crossed on the right one, whose wound it covers (...). The nail holes are in the middle of the long and beautiful hands, and there a blood rill winds (...) (but) from the ribs to the shoulders (nothing can be seen because of the burns). The arms are somewhat long and beautiful and in such a position that they show the entire stomach, cruelly tortured by the scourge blows. The side wound appears as wide as to allow the passage of three fingers, surrounded by a four-finger-wide blood trace, narrowing from below and approximately half foot long.

On the second half of this holy Shroud, which represents our Saviour's back, you can see the head nape pierced by long and big thorns, which are so thick that you can understand the crown was like a hat, and not like a circle, as the princes' crowns and the ones represented by painters. If you look at it carefully, you can notice the nape more tortured than the rest and the thorns stuck more deeply, with large drops of blood coagulated in his completely stained-with-blood hair. The blood traces under the nape are larger and more visible than the others, since the sticks they hit the crown with made the thorns enter as far as the brain, so that, having received mortal wounds, it was a miracle he did not die under the blows. Moreover, the wounds opened again because of the jolt of the cross, when the latter was put in the hole and, before that, when they made him fall on the cross in order to nail him to it. The shoulders are completely tortured and stormed by scourge blows which are everywhere. The blood drops appear as wide as sweet marjoram leaves; in several areas, there are large fractures because of the blows they gave him. In the middle of the body, you can notice the signs of the iron chain tying him to the column so tightly that he appears all stained with blood. The variety of blows shows that they used different kinds of scourge, such as rods with thorns twisted around, iron ropes lacerating him so cruelly that, watching the Shroud from below, when it was spread on the backing Holland cloth, we could see the wounds as if we watched through a glass-window.

All the nuns contemplated it very carefully, with a consolation that cannot be expressed and, through these beautiful prints, we could see that he truly was the fairest among the sons of men, according to David's prophecy, who had foretold it in one his psalms.

3. The Shroud withdrawal on the eve of the liturgical festival.

During the fifteen days this precious Relic remained in our Convent, we could not find the comfort of confessing to approach the Most Sacred Sacrament of the altar and to receive the Son of God, while we had a part of him in front of our eyes in his image painted with his own blood. Finally, we confessed at the wheel on Monday and Tuesday (April 27 and 28), and on Wednesday we fulfilled our devotion.

On that day, His Highness had to come to see where the works on the holy Shroud had got to, but, fearing to disturb us, he waited for the following morning (Thursday, April 30), at about seven, to give the orders about how to wrap the Shroud in the violet taffeta. After doing this, they brought us some cloths, besides the ones we already had. On Friday (May 1) all the inside and the outside was

stretched, and then they decided that the following day (Saturday, May 2) they would come to take it. (The festival had been celebrated on May 4 since 1506).

On that day, Monsignor Bishop of Belley, Monsignor Suffragan and many other priests, clergymen and nobles came. They watched what we had done and approved it. Then they raised the Shroud in order to let us see it once again, folded it on the roll with a red silk veil. Monsignor came in procession exactly in the same way as when he had brought it to us as far as the two doors of the convent. All the town bells rang, besides the trumpets and other symphonies. Meanwhile, the Bishops covered the holy Shroud with a golden cloth and carried it away. We all began to sing the hymn: “Jesus nostra Redemptio” (“Jesus our Redemption”). We all had lit candles. Finally, with all the possible devotion, the Bishops gave the Shroud to His Highness, who was waiting for them between the two doors.

(The Holy Shroud) was taken to the Castle with great solemnity, and we remained poor orphans of Him Who had visited us so benignly with his holy image.