

The Holy Shroud and Other Wonders

Dear Parishioners,

Last week I was blessed to have been in Turin, Italy, within whose cathedral is found the burial Shroud of our Blessed Lord. It is displayed behind glass at a side altar, and is mysteriously “enshrined” so that one cannot gaze directly upon it except on rare occasions. This creates an atmosphere of profound reverence, and the faithful were gathered about in hushed silence praying.

At another altar is the tomb of Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, the mountaineering son of a newspaper tycoon who spread Christian joy and charity throughout his city and died at age 24.

Were one to parachute into Europe and land randomly, one would end up in a place of historic interest, undoubtedly with the remains of a canonized Saint not far away. The Faith has left a very deep imprint in this land of many peoples and languages. One cannot but marvel at the unifying thread that Catholicism has wound across its borders and through the long ages. It is a great testimony to the enduring reality that is the One, True Faith.

I have been meeting and exchanging notes with many of the faithful, priests and religious whom I encounter here. The recurring motif is that the Church is still present and ought not to be taken lightly. Even those Europeans who attempt to ignore the Church cannot but do so in a way that unwittingly renders acknowledgement.

Thus, while it is rare in France to be properly addressed as a priest, it is not rare to be properly stared at! It is as if a deliberate effort is made to say, *“Excusez-moi, I am ignoring God right now and eating my foie gras at this very pleasant café, and in fact we as a nation have put it in writing that God does not matter. So what precisely are you doing, ‘Monsieur,’ walking about in public dressed like some executed ghost from the Revolution to haunt us and remind us that God does indeed exist! I have perfected politeness and you have put me in quite an awkward social situation! Now please pass the roasted duckling and a bit of that lovely cheese. Yes, the one that melts when it gets over 35 degrees Celsius, that is right. Si’il vous plait. Merci.”*

There is a certain *je ne sais quoi* in it all that seems simultaneously to convey guilty recognition coupled with adolescent resistance, almost as if one has been caught having too much fun whilst neglecting one’s more serious religious duties. It might even be charming in a very weird way. But don’t quote me on that last point, I need to think it through some more.

Now the word for shrine in French is *sanctuaire* (sanctuary). This sense of those holy places is quite marked in places noted for resistance to religion. At those shrines, one is always struck by the number of votive candles burning in testimony to someone’s faith, furtive or bold as the case may be. It is as if the Christians of the Catacombs have emerged once again to declare that indeed there are believers in the midst of the icy secular sea. The venerable Catholics of this Eldest Daughter of the Church are not an extinct species or museum piece. They are rather preparing and waiting...

Peace to you, my good and faithful friends. And thank you for your confident fidelity to the things of God.



Candles burning for your intentions at Our Lady's shrine in Banneux, Belgium.



Medieval image of Our Lady in Maastricht, Netherlands



Dutchman in prayer

Father de Rosa