

Meanwhile, an anonymous pilgrim arrived in Manoppello in 1508 with the cloth wrapped in a package and gave it to a Dr. Leonelli who was sitting on a bench in front of the church. He went into the church and unwrapped it, but on going out he could not find the person who had brought it. The cloth remained in the Leonelli family until they passed it on to another doctor who gave it to the Capuchins, who have held it ever since. Badde points out in his book that the dimensions of the cloth at Manoppello means that it would not fit in the frame now used in St. Peter's to hold what certainly appears to be a forgery. Perhaps because of the fact that St. Peter's still has what is purported to be the "Veil of Veronica", little attention had been drawn to the image at Manoppello. But Fr. Domenico da Cese believed it should be better known, and in 1977 he took a large photograph of it to a Eucharistic congress in Pescara, the nearest large centre. Then things started moving.

A journalist from Switzerland wrote an article about it, which came to the attention of a Trappistine nun in Germany, Sister Blandina Schömer. Fascinated by the image, she obtained permission to move to Italy and devote herself to research on it, which she has continued up until the present. Meanwhile, Fr. Domenico had gone to Turin in 1978 for an exposition of the Shroud and while there, he was killed when he was struck by a car after leaving the cathedral. He was reputed to have the stigmata and cures have been attributed to his intercession, and moves are now being made to begin the Cause of his beatification.

The principal findings of the research by Sister Blandina and others are that:

- the cloth is so thin and delicate it would be impossible to paint on it;
- The image is visible from both sides;
- When superimposed on the image of the face on the Shroud of Turin, the image of Manoppello matches exactly.

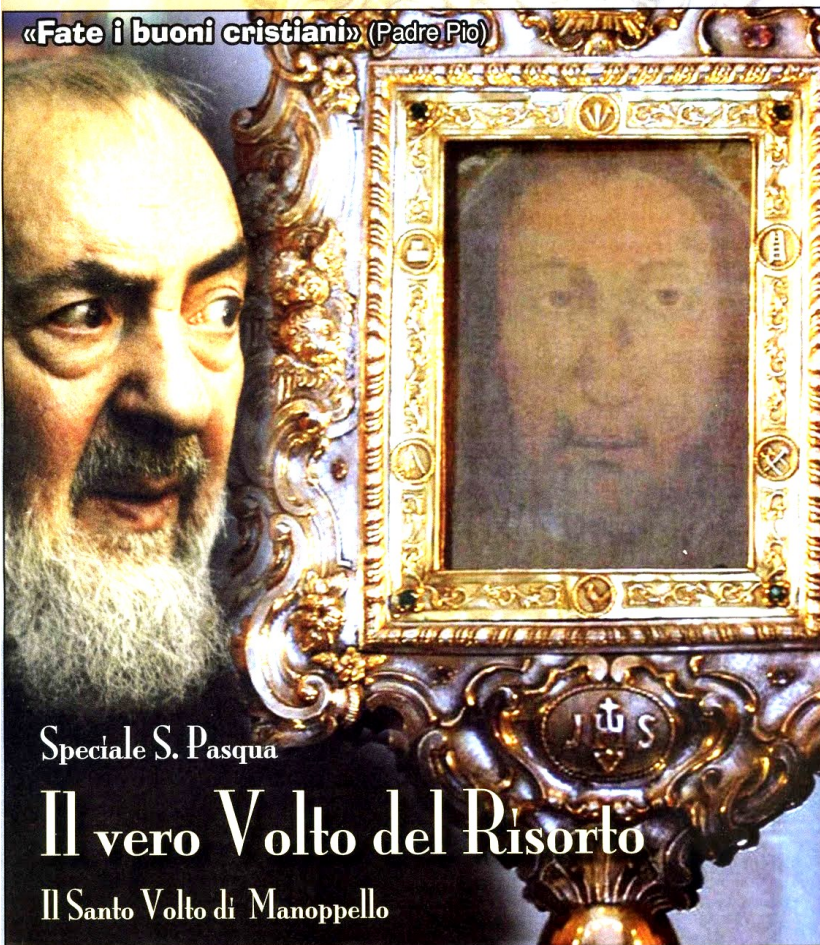
**The conclusion is that the Holy Face of Manoppello is very likely the cloth "rolled up by itself", found by Peter and John in the tomb on the first Easter morning.** The visit to Manoppello by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006 was the first journey of his pontificate inside Italy upon which he himself had decided. His homilies have increasingly contained references to the Face of Jesus.

Padre Pio was canonised in 2002. Did he make one last visit to look upon the Face of the Man whose wounds he had borne for 50 years before entering into the eternal vision of his glorified Lord?

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## ***Padre Pio and the Holy Face of Manoppello***

### **Il Settimanale di Padre Pio**



***Padre Pio, Padre Domenico da Cese  
and the Holy Face of Manoppello  
by Paul MacLeod (Belmont, Victoria, Australia)***

*This article originally appeared in an issue of the magazine “The Voice of Padre Pio” and also has appeared in the diocesan newspaper of the Archdiocese of Perth in Australia. Thanks to Mr. Paul MacLeod (a friend of both my wife and I, along with Padre Pio’s cousin Anthony who introduced us to Paul), Paul’s article is a major contribution to the knowledge of the Holy Face of Manoppello wherein, he summarizes the most important elements of the Holy Face and highlights Padre Pio’s devotion to it, and the special last visit Padre Pio made to the Holy Face to his friend and fellow Capuchin—the Servant of God Father Domenico da Cese—the apostle of the Holy Face.*

### **Padre Pio’s Last Visit**

In September, 1968, Padre Pio’s life was nearing its end. He was 81, and for two months he had not been well. But September 20 was the 50th anniversary of his receiving the stigmata, and his prayer groups had gathered at his friary at San Giovanni Rotondo to celebrate that event. He said Mass that day, but was unable to the following day. However, he gathered the last of his strength on Sunday, September 22, to say Mass in a church packed with pilgrims. At the end, he nearly collapsed and had to be helped from the altar.

A little earlier that morning, a fellow Capuchin and friend of Padre Pio, Fr. Domenico da Cese, went to open the church at Manoppello, more than 200 kilometres away to the north, in the province of Abruzzi. Inside the church he found Padre Pio on his knees, his head in his hands, before the image known as the Holy Face. Padre Pio said to him: “I do not trust myself any more. Pray for me. Goodbye until we meet again in Paradise.” Within 24 hours, Padre Pio died in his cell in the friary at San Giovanni Rotondo.

Padre Pio was known for his not-infrequent bilocation—being in two places at once—even attending the canonization of St. Therese of Lisieux, in St. Peter’s basilica in 1925. Pope Benedict XVI was to visit the image at Manoppello nearly 40 years later, but by a more mundane method of transport, by helicopter. But why did Padre Pio and the Pope choose to visit the Holy Face?

Since 1660, the church at Manoppello has contained an ancient piece of a rare cloth known as byssos, or sea-silk, a gossamer-thin and transparent fabric woven from fibre from mussels, once used in Egypt to cover the faces of dead Pharaohs. This cloth bears the image of the face of a bearded man with open eyes, a slightly opened mouth and a bruised left cheek. It was believed locally to be what was once known as the Veil of Veronica.

In St. Peter’s basilica in Rome, one of the four massive columns supporting the dome has long been known as the “Veronica pillar”. It features a statue of Veronica with a cloth bearing an image of the face of Christ and a bas-relief of an angel also displaying the image. Within the pillar is a treasury in which is kept what is claimed to be the cloth with which a woman named Veronica wiped the face of Jesus on His way to Calvary. This cloth, contained in a reliquary and shown to the people in St. Peter’s on Passion Sunday each year, is black with brown areas and no visible image. It was placed in the pillar in 1625 by Pope Urban VIII. Where did it come from?

Well, the existence of a portrait of Christ “not made by human hands” had been known since the sixth century, and from 705 it had been kept in its own chapel in the old St. Peter’s, built by Constantine. It became known as the “vera eikon”, or “true image”, and the name “Veronica” appears to have been applied in the Middle Ages to a woman whom Blessed Anna Catherine Emmerich names as Seraphia in her account of her visions of the Passion. How did it get to Rome?

This question is discussed at length in a recent book by a German journalist, Paul Badde. He suggests that the cloth was, in fact, “the napkin which had been on His (Jesus’) head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself” (Jn 20:7). Badde recalls a tradition that a cloth with the face of Jesus was taken by the Apostle Jude after the Ascension to King Abgar of Edessa, a prominent city at the time, some 600 kilometres from Jerusalem and now known as Urfa, in Turkey. The king was immediately cured of an illness that had kept him bedridden. Another very old tradition says that the Greeks who came to Philip asking “to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21) had been sent by Abgar. The cloth apparently remained in Edessa, and was hidden in the city wall when the city was under attack. It was rediscovered in 525 and taken to Constantinople, then to Genoa and finally to Rome. So what is the cloth at Manoppello?

As already stated, the “image” now kept in the pillar in St. Peter’s was placed there in 1625, after rebuilding work. But it was—it seems—not the image that had been venerated there for centuries. It had disappeared, probably in 1506, stolen from the frame in which it was held by two sheets of glass. The frame, broken glass and all, is still to be seen in the treasury at St. Peter’s. (there are fragments of glass in the cloth at Manoppello.) Interestingly, Pope Urban VIII promptly issued a decree ordering the destruction of any copies of the “Veronica”, unwilling to admit that one of the most precious relics in Christendom had vanished.