

Today is the Fifth Sunday in Lent. It marks the beginning of “Passiontide,” a two-week period when Christians focus on the sufferings, Passion, and Death of Jesus Christ.

Next week, Christians will celebrate Palm Sunday. So begins an intensive reflection on the last days of Jesus: his entry into glory in Jerusalem; his Last Supper with his apostles; and his betrayal, crucifixion, and death on the Cross, which we recall on Good Friday.

These events are but a prelude to his Resurrection joyfully observed on Easter Sunday.

To mark Passiontide, the newly constructed Church of St. Isidore in Kanata will host a remarkable exhibit expected to draw thousands. It will feature a life-sized linen replica of the famous Shroud of Turin, which many believe is the burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

The Shroud is a phenomenon rich in puzzles and religious significance. At the very least, it is an icon of Christ, worthy of veneration. At the other extreme, it may be evidence of Christ’s burial and Resurrection. Its record in history began around 1360 AD in Europe, yet it contains soil and pollen specific to Jerusalem. It seems to be a negative 3D image projected from the inside out...graphic techniques unknown in antiquity and medieval times. One controversy is that the nail scar appears in a wrist, not the more traditional palm, of the Christ figure.

Several years ago, I saw this relic in Turin. It reveals the mercy of Christ for the world as Jesus gave himself up to death out of love for humanity.

For hours, I explored the multi-media display at the exposition. Through it, I became deeply aware that Jesus had died for me and for the many people to whom I minister. It was a stirring and memorable experience.

The explanatory panels and interpretive presentations given by scholars greatly enlightened my visit to Turin. These will also be offered to the faithful, the curious, and the skeptics who will visit the display in Kanata.

The exhibit at St. Isidore Church was assembled by the Vancouver Shroud Association, which houses it when it is not travelling to parishes and schools across the country. In addition to the replica of the Shroud, there are 27 poster-sized museum boards explaining the latest research on it.

Also on display will be replicas of items associated with Christ's Passion. They include the crown of thorns, a crucifixion nail, a Roman scourge, and the lance that pierced Christ's side. Two Shroud experts, Barrie M. Schwartz and Dr. Phillip Wiebe, will give lectures at midday and in the evening.

Coordinating such an exhibit can be demanding. St. Isidore pastor, Father Virgil Amirthakumar, turned to Janice and Allan O'Dacre to organize the program. She had been involved in education and he in software and management. They and their team captains have assembled more than 160 volunteers to ensure a pleasant experience from the parking lot to the viewing area.

The event is ecumenical. Anyone can come: all faiths and no faith. Admission is free, but the parish will accept donations to defray costs. The parishioners of St. Isidore are taking seriously their role as Catholic witnesses to visitors of all backgrounds attending the exhibit.

I hope that you and your family will come to learn of this mysterious cloth from long ago. I believe the experience will challenge you to reflect on the person of Jesus Christ and his message for you.

“The Man of the Shroud” (“L’Homme du Suaire”) runs from April 4–11 at St. Isidore Church, 1135 March Road, Kanata. There is more information on the exhibit at www.theshroud.org.