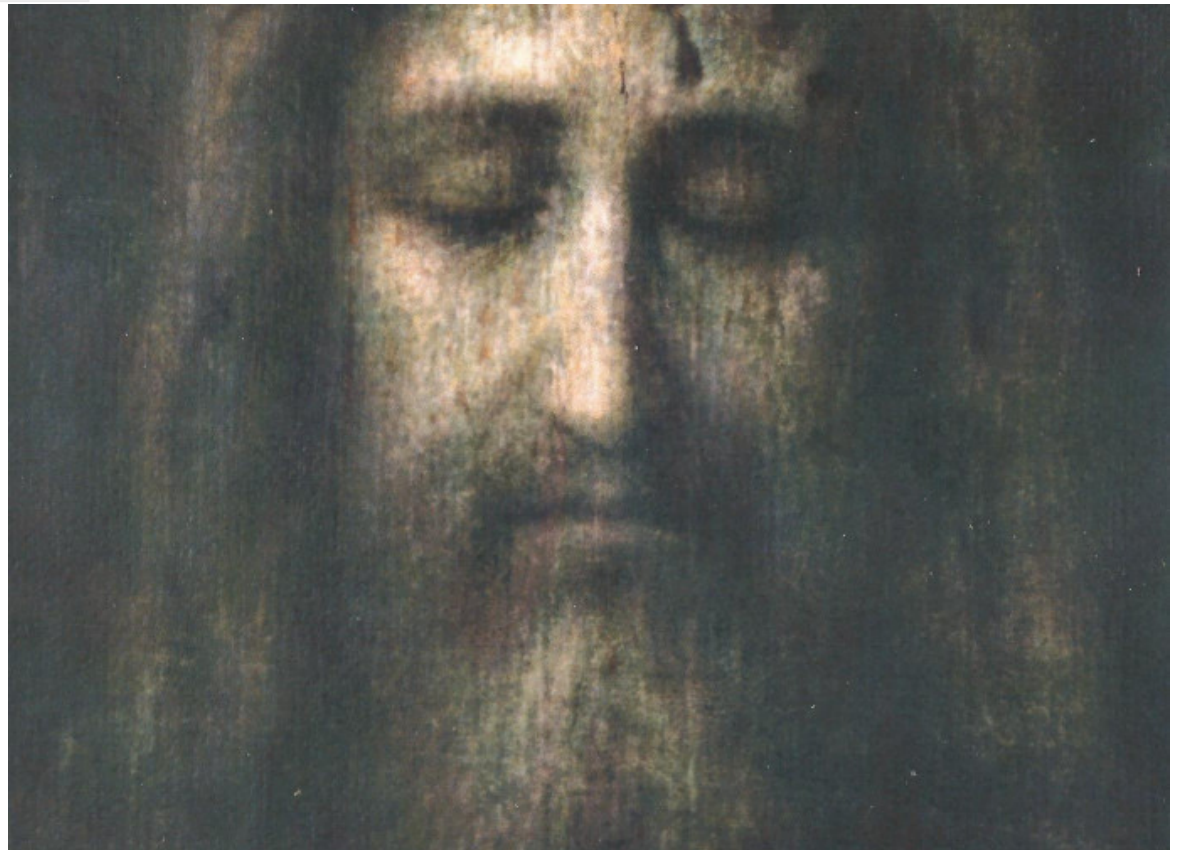


FEAST DAY

The Holy Face, light that pierces the darkness of the world

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The Daily Compass received and is publishing the meditation of a Benedictine monk, written on the occasion of the Feast of the Holy Face of Jesus, which falls today, Shrove Tuesday.

In the Gospel for Quinquagesima Sunday (Luke 18:31-43), read in the *usus antiquior* two days before the feast of the Holy Face of Jesus, Saint Luke presents us with a blind man sitting by the roadside, a beggar. This blind man is a symbol of all humanity. He is a symbol of those who, although they cannot see, hear the footsteps of a crowd, of those who question the meaning of what is happening today in the Church and in the world. They are like those who wait for someone to tell them that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by; and also like those who, moved by a mysterious infusion of hope, cry out: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (Lk 18:38).

Today, no less than then, there are those who would silence the cry born of hope. Those who went before him reviled him because he was silent, but he cried out all the more: Son of David, have mercy on me" (Lk 18:39).

Jesus presents himself. He reveals himself to the blind eyes of the beggar. At this moment, the words of the Psalmist are fulfilled: "The Lord has heard the prayer of the poor, your ear has listened to the preparation of their hearts" (Psalm 10:17). *Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus; præparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua*). The beggar's blindness was the preparation of his heart. What do you want me to do for you?" he said, "Lord, make me see again. And Jesus said to him, 'See again! Your faith has saved you" (Lk 18:41-42). At that moment, the beggar's eyes were opened to see nothing less than "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus" (2 Cor 4:6).

There is no blindness, no sickness, no darkness, no emptiness that cannot, in God's mysterious providence, serve to prepare the heart to contemplate the Holy Face of Jesus. The seed of true devotion to the Holy Face is planted deep in the soil of humanity, in a fertile humus made by the accumulation of all that man loses, all that rots and even the sins that force him to cry out for mercy.

Twenty years ago, on 1 April 2005, the day before the death of John Paul II, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said in Subiaco:

"We need men whose gaze is fixed on God and who learn from Him true humanity. We need men whose minds are enlightened by the light of God and to whom God opens their hearts, so that their minds can speak to the minds of others and their hearts can

open the hearts of others."

In the darkness of the present hour, the feast of the Holy Face of Jesus is an urgent invitation addressed to all, but especially to the shepherds of God's flock (cf. 1 Peter 5:2: *Pascite qui in vobis est gregem Dei*. Be shepherds of the flock which God has given you"). The multitude of those who have lived and died with their eyes fixed on the face of Christ, the saints of every age, say in unison: *Accedite ad eum, et illuminamini; et facies vestrae non confundentur*. "Come near to Him and be enlightened, and your faces will not blush" (Psalm 33:6). This was the message of the future Pope Benedict XVI on that spring day twenty years ago in Subiaco:

"Only through men touched by God can God return to men. We need men like Benedict of Nursia, who, in a time of dissipation and decadence, immersed himself in the most extreme solitude and, after all the purifications he had to undergo, succeeded in ascending to the light."

There is no ascent to "God who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim 6:16) that is not an aspiration to the face of Christ. Outside the light that shines from the face of Christ, all is darkness. Devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus is in fact the practical application of the doctrine presented in the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under the leadership of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger:

First of all, it is necessary to affirm the definitive and complete character of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Indeed, we must firmly believe that in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), the fullness of divine truth is revealed: No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Mt 11:27); "No one has ever seen God; only the Son, who is close to the Father's heart, has made Him known" (Jn 1:18); "For in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead has been made bodily, and in Christ you have been given the fullness" (Col 2:9-10).

On the occasion of the first canonisations of his Pontificate, on 23 October 2005, Benedict XVI once again turned the Church's gaze to the face of Christ, citing the example of Saint Gaetano Catanoso, "lover and apostle of the Holy Face of Jesus". The German theologian and Supreme Pontiff did not hesitate to mention the humble Calabrian priest: "If we want to adore the true face of Jesus (...) we can find it in the divine Eucharist, where, together with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the face of our Lord is hidden under the white veil of the Host. To those who approach Him in the

sacrament of His love and seek the light of His face, our Lord Jesus Christ repeats what He said to the beggar at the roadside: "Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you" (Lk 28:42).

In this Jubilee Year of 2025, marked by darkness and uncertainty for so many, the Feast of the Sacred Face of Jesus offers an infusion of hope for families, parishes, monasteries, religious communities and individuals. It is also an invitation to repeat the words of the prophet Daniel in a fervent plea for the universal Church: "O God, let your face shine upon your sanctuary" (Dan 9:17).