

## POPE ARRANGES FOR TURIN SHROUD TO GO ON DISPLAY AS HIS 'LAST GIFT'

The mystical Shroud of Turin will go on display next month - after Pope Benedict XVI gave the go ahead in what Vatican sources said was his 'last gift' to the Roman Catholic Church.

TV cameras will be allowed to broadcast images of one of Christianity's most mysterious relics, which is believed to have covered the body of Christ following his death and which is particularly poignant to Pope Benedict XVI who will officially retire later this week.

Thirteen years ago when the Pope was cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he wrote the Shroud was 'a truly mysterious image, which no human artistry was capable of producing.'



Sacred relic: The Pope arranged for the Turin Shroud, pictured here in 1998, to go on display next month as his 'last gift'

'In some inexplicable way, it appeared imprinted upon cloth and claimed to show the true face of Christ, the crucified and risen Lord.'

In May 2010, five years after he became Pope he authorised a public viewing of the Shroud - the first since 2000 and also 15 years ahead of its next scheduled public display.

He was one of two million people who went to Turin Cathedral where the Shroud was displayed and where among the visitors was former prime minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie, who along with her husband is a devout Roman Catholic.

The showing three years ago was only the fifth time in 100 years that it has been viewed publicly and the latest will take place on Easter Saturday (30th March) with further details due to be announced by monsignor Cesare Nosiglia, the Archbishop of Turin and the Pontifical Curator of the Shroud.

When the Pope saw the Shroud three years ago he spent several minutes kneeling in front of the 14ft long linen cloth, which bears the faint image of the front and back of a tall, long-haired, bearded man and appears to be stained by blood from wounds in his feet, wrists and side.

The Shroud, worthy of a Dan Brown thriller, has captivated the imagination of historians, church chiefs, sceptics and Catholics for more than 500 years.

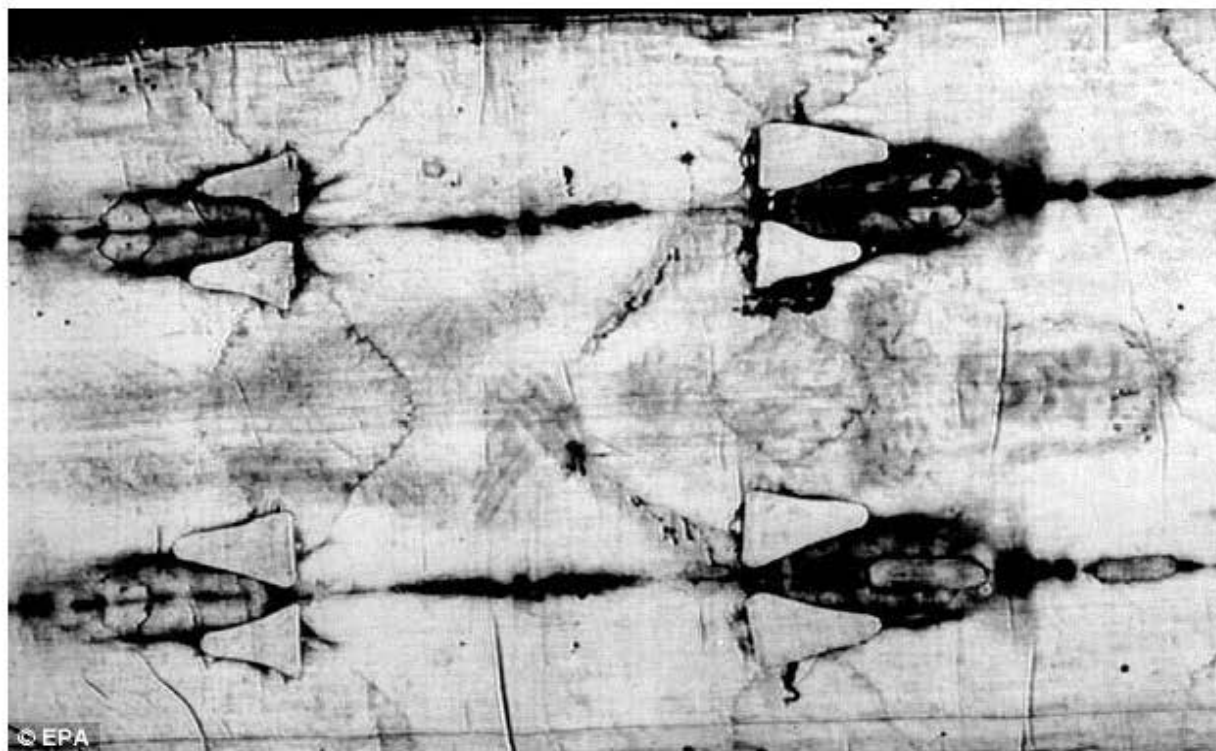
It even gripped occult obsessed Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler who wanted to steal it so he could use it in a black magic ceremony, a monk revealed for the first time last month.

It is believed by many to have been the burial cloth used to cover Christ's body but others have dismissed it as an elaborate fake from the Middle Ages.

After praying silently in front of the Shroud, which is kept in a bullet proof climate controlled glass case, in the cathedral of the northern Italian city of Turin, Pope Benedict described it as "an extraordinary icon".

He said: 'It is a burial cloth that covered a crucified man in correspondence with what the Gospels tell us. Jesus remained in the tomb until dawn the day after Holy

Saturday and it offers us a picture of how his body was, lying in the tomb, which was short in time but infinite in significance and value.'



The shroud, which is believed to bear the true image of Christ after he covered his body following his death is particularly poignant to Pope Benedict, who described it as a truly mysterious image'

Pope Benedict added that the Shroud also offered "light in darkness" as it allowed people to see the "victory of life over death." Christians believe that three days after he was crucified Christ rose from the dead.

A Vatican source said: "The Holy Father was particularly taken when he saw the Shroud on his visit to Turin and it is a striking symbol of faith. He agreed to its display on Easter Saturday because it is the day before Easter Sunday, the day Christ rose which is the corner stone of Catholic faith.

In effect it's perhaps one of his last gifts to the faithful - allowing them to see the Shroud, so they can see this extraordinary icon for themselves and it's also connected to the current Year of Faith which Pope Benedict opened.'

Italian state TV will broadcast footage of the Shroud but it is not thought that general public access will be allowed until 2025 the date of the next scheduled display.