



Easter Reflections



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF FATHER STEPHEN FICHTER



Happy Easter to all! Not only does Easter come at a very beautiful time of the year when it seems that the whole world is coming alive after a long period of dormancy, but it is also an amazing time liturgically, when the deep Lenten shades of purple fall away to the blinding white of the Resurrection. Sadness and death's defeat no longer have any hold over us for we are now joyous in Jesus' triumph!

The words defeat and triumph remind me of my years on the wrestling team at Bergen Catholic. Let me immediately clarify that I was by no means a star wrestler. However, I certainly learned a lot about discipline and humility, especially when I was pinned on my back, and the referee was pounding the mat counting one, two, three!

Think about that humiliation in terms of the Crucifixion. Jesus was flat on His back as He was nailed to the Cross. It appeared that His imminent death would be the ultimate defeat. Good Friday was the first pound on the mat. Holy Saturday was count two, but the difference is there was no count three. On Easter Sunday, Jesus shed every restraint and in a glorious explosion of victory, He won for us eternal salvation. Prior to His Resurrection, death was the undefeated wrestler.

I have long been fascinated by the Shroud of Turin. It is a relic steeped in deep mystery concerning its origin. There is a profusion of information to be gathered in terms of the severe wounds suffered by Jesus, His

physical stature, and incredibly, the ability to see His face. The complication arises in scientific circles, when there is no definitive answer to explain how such an image was transferred to the cloth in the first place. One theory proposed by the Italian chemist Giulio Fanti of the University of Padua is that a burst of "radiant energy" emanated from the body itself. We will never know in this lifetime, but this concept fits quite well with our contemplation of that first radiant Easter Sunday morning.

Almost a dozen years ago, I led a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I was blessed to have my spiritual director, Father Bill Poorten, SJ, along with me. Father Bill has since passed away, but I still have the beautiful photo you see here of Father Bill kneeling in our boat praying, while we crossed the lake known as the Sea of Galilee. Once we reached the middle of the lake, the captain cut our engines so that we could simply enjoy the silence of that sacred place.

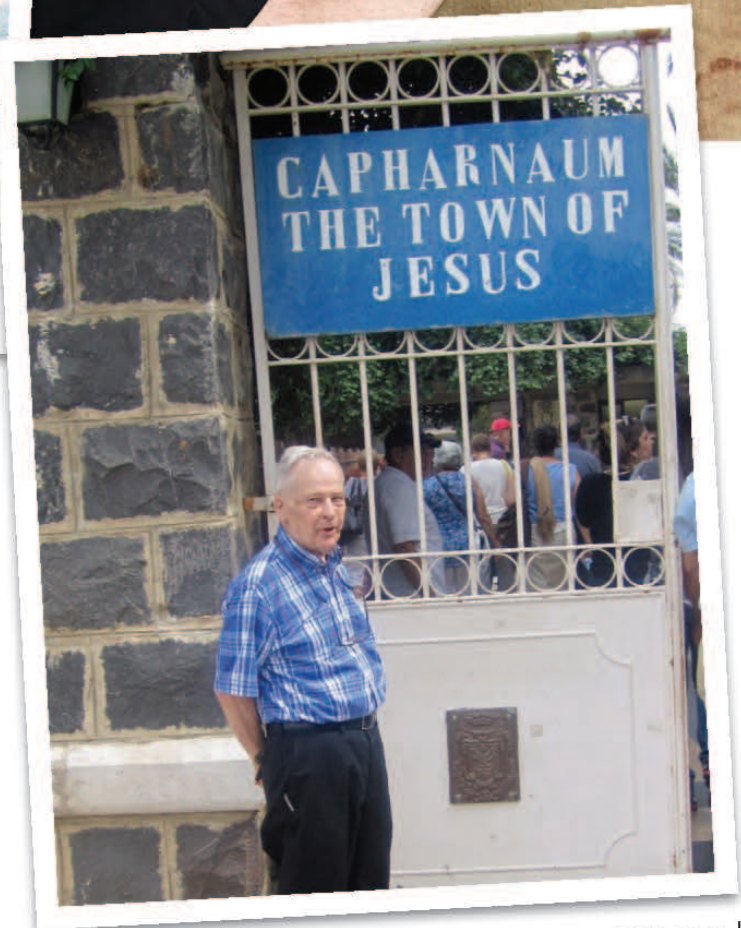
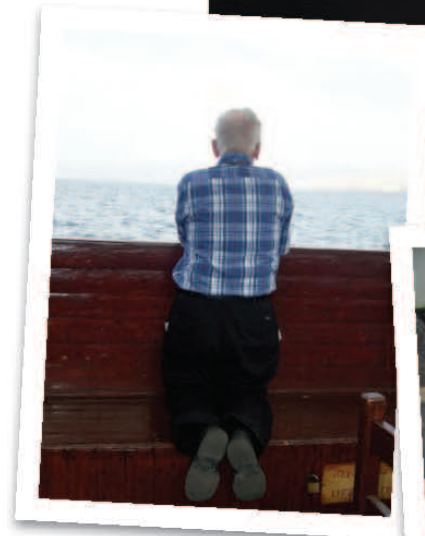
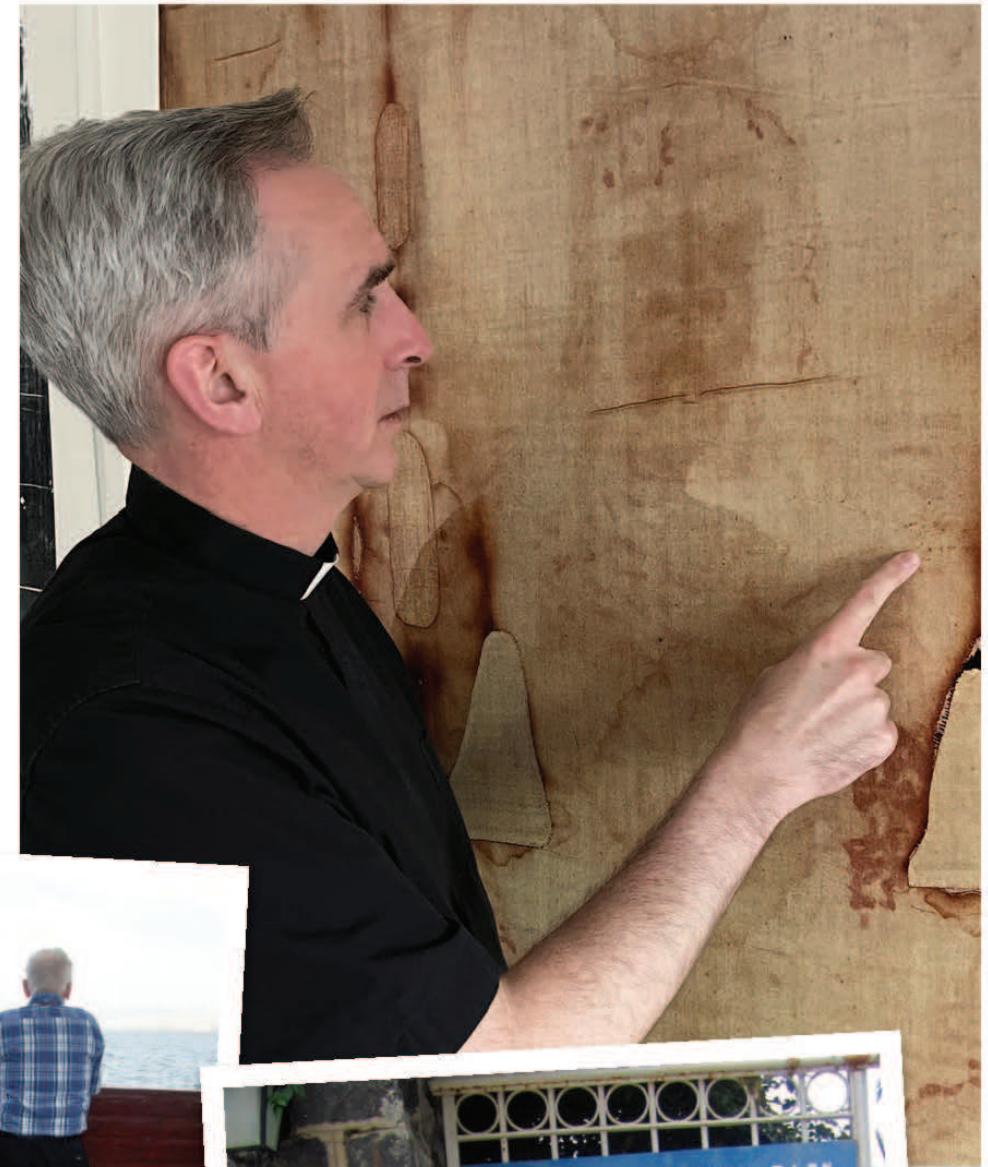
It's a unique experience when you realize that your eyes are seeing the same undulating hills that Jesus saw when He and the Apostles frequented the shores. The cool and clear water reflects the beauty of the surrounding rough terrain, while an abundance of fish swim freely as they did over 2,000 years ago.

I thought of all that happened here. Jesus walked on this water and filled empty nets to overflowing. He preached and healed here, and as the resurrected Christ, He made and ate breakfast with some of the disciples on the beach.

Watching the water from the boat, I continued to reflect that Jesus was born to walk among us and teach us how to live holy lives. He would also die so that we might live forever. His human existence, and ultimately ours, would be changed forever as He manifested His glorious Resurrection.

We are reminded of this extraordinary meaning of the Resurrection during the funeral Mass, when the priest says "vita mutatur, non tollitur". Translated, it means that life is changed, not taken away. I often explain this phrase at funerals. The deceased may no longer exist in the way we have known them in the world, but the deceased is very much alive to God. The circumstances have changed in our earthly relationship with our loved one, but we will see them again when we too have our own triumphant moment over death! For me, it will be like the ref holding my hand high in the air and proclaiming me victor.

Indeed, a happy Easter to all!



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