

## THE "HOLY ROBE" – Tunic of Our Lord Jesus Christ – "Seamless Robe" Facts and Thoughts



### TRIER CATHEDRAL

Though it might be mistaken for a fortress, Trier Cathedral (Dom St. Peter) houses an impressive collection of artworks, architecture and holy relics. It is also of considerable historical significance, as the oldest church in Germany. Today, Trier Cathedral is a vibrant g Catholic cathedral and an important shrine that still receives pilgrims.

#### History

Christianity first arrived in Trier as early as the late 100s AD, although local legend has it that the faith was established in the first century by bishop Eucharius sent by the apostle Peter himself.

The history of Dom St. Peter begins in Roman times, when a church was built by Constantine, the first Christian emperor, over the palace of his mother Helena. Construction began in 326 AD, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his reign.

The Constantinian church was four times as big as the present-day cathedral, covering the area of the cathedral, the Church of Our Lady, the Cathedral Square, the adjoining garden, and the houses almost up to the Main Market.

After extensive damage in the 5th and 9th centuries, the surviving part of Constantine's church was enlarged with major additions in the Romanesque style in 1035. Gothic and Baroque touches were later added, and the various styles blend nicely together, bringing a timeless unity to the interior.

In the Middle Ages, the Archbishop of Trier was an important ecclesiastical prince, controlling land from the French border to the Rhine. He was also one of the seven electors of the Holy Roman Empire.

## THE HOLY ROBE

SCRIPTURE: John 19,23-24

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“When the soldiers had crucified Jesus,  
they took his clothes and divided them into four parts,  
one for each soldier.  
They also took his tunic;  
now the tunic was seamless,  
woven in one piece from the top.  
So they said to one another,  
“Let us not tear it,  
but cast lots for it to see who will get it.”  
This was to fulfill what the scripture says,  
“They divided my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

According to the Gospel of John, the soldiers who crucified Jesus did not divide his tunic after crucifying him, but cast lots to determine who would keep it because it was woven in one piece, without seam. A distinction is made in the New Testament Greek between the himatia (literally “over-garments”) and the seamless robe, which is chiton, (literally “tunic” or “coat”).

“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments (ta himatia) and divided them into four parts, to every soldier a part, and the coat (kai ton chitona). Now the coat was without seam, woven whole from the top down. Therefore, they said among themselves, let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it will become. Thus the saying in Scripture was fulfilled: they divided My raiment (ta imatia) among them, and upon My vesture (epi ton himatismos) did they cast lots” (John 19:23-24; quoting the Septuagint version of Psalm 21 [22]:18-19).

### The naked king

the four soldiers who crucify Jesus  
strip him of his clothes.  
He becomes the naked King.,  
stripped of power, mobility and dignity,  
to reveal the truth of love in and offering of self.  
Truth can be so stark that we turn our eyes away from it.  
They decide to cut his outer garment into four pieces,  
one for each of them,  
but the tunic is seamless, woven in one piece,  
probably by the mother of Jesus.  
The soldiers do not tear it but cast lots to see who would get it.  
The gospel notes with a certain solemnity that they did this  
in order to fulfill Scripture:  
They divided my garments among them  
and cast lots for my clothing. Ps 22:18

Jean Vanier,  
Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus  
through the Gospel of John, p. 322

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## HISTORY

The Empress St. Helena is known for her pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and pious legend has it that she brought back the Holy Robe of Christ from Jerusalem and entrusted it to her son's new church at Trier. The Holy Robe is the seamless garment said to be worn by Christ during the Crucifixion.

According to one tradition, Helena, mother of Constantine the Great discovered the seamless robe in the Holy Land in the year 327 or 328 along with several other relics, including the True Cross. According to different versions of the story, she either bequeathed it or sent it to the city of Trier, where Constantine had lived for some years before becoming emperor. (The monk Altmann of Hautvillers wrote in the 9th century that Helena was born in that city, though this report is strongly disputed by most modern historians.)

The Robe first makes an appearance in written documents in the 12th century. In 1512, the high altar of Trier Cathedral was opened and the Robe was found inside, along with other important relics from the Holy Land.

The Holy Robe was first displayed in Trier in 1512 for a period of 23 days, during which more than 100,000 pilgrims came to venerate it.

The next year, a wooden balcony was built onto the west front of the cathedral in order to display the Holy Robe and the other Trier relics to crowds gathered in Cathedral Square. It has been periodically displayed since then, attracting ever-larger crowds.

The expositions in public were rare:

1513, 1514, 1515, 1516, 1517, 1524, 1538, 1545, 1655, 1810, 1844, 1891,

In the last century: 1933, 1959, 1996

The exposition of the relic, for three weeks in 1933, drew 2 million pilgrims. In 1959, the relic was sealed in a splendid shrine in its own chapel, where it remains today. Since the Cathedral renovation in 1974, the Holy Robe has been kept in its wooden shrine from 1891, lying under an air-conditioned glass shrine.

The Holy Robe was exposed again in 1996, 800 years after it was immured in the main altar. The last great pilgrimage, in 1996, became a joyful celebration of about 700 000 pilgrims from all over the world. In 2012 the Holy Robe will be displayed again – to remember its first public display in 1512.

The relic is enshrined in a reliquary housed in the specially-built baroque Chapel of the Holy Robe, located behind the altar. You can just get a glimpse of the large shrine, and much of the splendid Chapel remains hidden as well.

Only during the Holy Robe Days the Holy Robe chapel is accessible, but the garment cannot be viewed. The original state of the textile has altered because of past events and the unfavorable storage conditions, as repairs have frequently been made.

## HISTORY and FAITH

The question of the authenticity of the Holy Robe cannot not be answered with certainty. For the faithful, the symbolism is important: the relic signifies Jesus Christ himself

- his incarnation
- his humanity
- his solidarity with the poor

- his crucifixion and his death
- his presence after his resurrection
- his call to unity among his people



**SYMBOL for CHRISTIAN UNITY**

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The undivided and seamless garment is a symbol of undivided Christianity, since the early Fathers of Faith (cf. Augustine, Tractatus in Joannis Evangelium 118; Cyprian of Carthago, De unitate ecclesiae Cap7).

Despite its symbolism since the 16<sup>th</sup> century the veneration of the Holy Robe has been a sign of the separation among the Christian churches and denominations. Features of the Catholic rituals and teachings prompted Protestants to protest. Martin Luther called it rudely the “Scam of Trier”.

In 1996 the Holy Robe became a strong sign for the Ecumenical desire for Christian unity. Bishop Dr. Hermann Josef Spital invited all Christian traditions to accompany and participate in the pilgrimage. The president of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland wrote one of the most prominent pilgrim hymns.

In the preparation for the pilgrimage in 2012 a leading person in the Protestant Church of the Rhineland has recently suggested a new different approach: “Protestants trust the “Text” more than a “textile” – but when a “textile” leads to the “Text”, there is nothing wrong about that.” The Protestant superintendant of Trier said: “We trust the Catholics in the Diocese of Trier, as we have a long and steadfast experience of cooperation. We will remain Protestants – and yet participate as much as we can.”

**PILGRIM PRAYER**

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The Trier pilgrim prayer expresses Christ’s call and our desire for Christian unity:

"Jesus Christ, Savior and Redeemer,  
have mercy on us and all the world.  
Remember your Christian people,  
and bring together all that is separated.  
Amen."



## PILGRIMAGE 2012

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Motto: "... and bring together all that is separated!"

636 ideas about a motto arrived in the Pilgrim's Office when Bishop Ackermann invited the diocese to come up with suggestions...

On April 25, 2010 the "winner" was published: "... and bring together all that is separated"

A simple line: The last line of the Holy Robe Pilgrim prayer.

The motto for the Pilgrimage 2012: "

... and bring together all that is separated"

It summons our fundamental desire for life and faith:

Calling for God's shepherding in the many areas of our existence.

The Holy Robe is one – seamless: a symbol for unity – beyond separation.

A redeemed world.

... and bring together all that is separated"

Separation, division, alienation define our lives: on the personal level, in relationships, our families and communities, in our society, in our church. Separation, alienation hurt and cause pain.

We look out for healing, reconciliation, redemption.

... and bring together all that is separated"

Separation, division, alienation are part of our human condition, they were there before we were born, but they are also consequences of our actions and words and omissions. We are not only victims but committers.

... and bring together all that is separated"

Jesus left his disciples with his testament and his vision of salvation:

I ask not only on behalf of these,

but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,  
that they may all be one.

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,  
so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jn 17,20

Unity and salvation are the two sides of the same coin.

When the world finds together, salvation is growing.

Salvation calls for unity.

... and bring together all that is separated"

Unity is creative, brings something new. Something which maybe never existed before.

Is more than just collecting separate pieces. Unity is a miracle. A gift. Has a new quality.

A flock is more than just the sum of each and every sheep. A flock is "catholic": unifying, united.

Unity has many faces, experiences, languages, colors. Unity is a fabric with many threads.



"... and bring together what is separated"

To prepare ourselves in the year before the pilgrimage Catholic Charities in the Trier diocese invite their lay groups and their agencies to look deeper into some areas of separations we are facing in our "charity work":

- 1) Circumstances of life: poor and rich
- 2) Inclusion: live together with and with/without handicaps
- 3) Generations: youngsters and seniors
- 4) Commitment: volunteers and professionals
- 5) Life at the borderlines: sick and healthy
- 6) Relationships with distance: counselor and client
- 7) One ministry: charity and pastoral care
- 8) Being in relationships: Communication and presence
- 9) We and the others: belonging, migration, ecumenical relations

People are invited to prepare themselves together throughout the year 2011/2012 and then come together to the Holy Robe between April, 13 and May 13 2012.

