



CUSTODIA TERRÆ SANCTÆ

**CELEBRATIONS FOR THE RE-OPENING OF THE MEMORIAL OF MOSES
MOUNT NEBO - JORDAN**

Saturday, October 15, 2016 at 4:00 pm
Civil Ceremony to inaugurate Restored Memorial of Moses

**SPEECH OF FR. FRANCESCO PATTON,
CUSTOS OF THE HOLY LAND**

Your Most Reverend Eminence, Cardinal Leonardo SANDRI, Prefect of the
Congregation for Oriental Churches;

Your Most Reverend Excellency, Monsignor Ortega MARTÍN, Apostolic Nuncio in
Jordan;

Your Excellencies Lina Ennab Minister of Tourism, Mohamad Smeiran Governor
of Madaba and Mostafà Ma'ayaah Mayor of Madaba;

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Representatives of the civil and military
Authorities here present;

Reverend Religious and dear Friends,

The Lord give you His peace.

With God's grace, like Moses we have come up "from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, the peak of Pisgah, opposite Jericho" (Dt 34:1) to reopen this Sanctuary for visits and prayers. This is the place of the memory of Moses and of his death. For us Christians Moses prefigures Christ. We are gathered here, on the footsteps of our forefathers in the faith, together with many brothers and sisters who like them, and like us, along many centuries have walked and continue to journey on this land believing in the future plan of God, the future plan of peace and life for the entire human race.



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I greet all of you with respect and gratitude, and in a particular way I want to remember His Majesty Abd Allah the Second, King of Jordan, and I thank with all my heart the Authorities of the noble Kingdom of Jordan for the support and closeness they have shown towards our Franciscan presence and mission along the course of so many years. We are well aware of the value of this place for all those who live in this noble Land and of the affection of the entire Nation for this place and for its cultural and religious significance.

I recall to mind and greet in a special way our dear and beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, who is here present in the person of His special Envoy, the Lord Cardinal Leonardo SANDRI, Prefect of the Congregation for Oriental Churches. Cardinal Sandri, I thank you for your presence and for the esteem which you show in accompanying our Franciscan mission in this Land of the Holy One.

A special thanks to the Italian Government represented here by His Excellency the Ambassador of Italy Giovanni Brauzzi, for all the efforts and financial support to the restoration of this beautiful archaeological site and of many others initiatives of the Custody of the Holy Land.

By greeting all of you, I recall with grateful memory all those who, in the past and present, have dedicated their time, intelligence and energy to give back to us the possibility to stay in this Sanctuary, to admire the beauty which it enshrines and to pray in this Place, which reminds us of the figure of Moses, who is dear to us and to our brethren from different Faiths. I would like to recall with particular gratitude Br. Jerome MIHAIC, who way back in 1932 acquired this site for the Custody of the Holy Land, as well as Fr. Michele PICCIRILLO and all those who, with him, have laboured to give us today the possibility to live this magnificent moment.

The Book of Deuteronomy states that, in this place, before the death of Moses, “the Lord showed him the whole country: Gilead as far as Dan, the whole of Naphtali, the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, the whole country of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negheb, and the region of the Valley of Jericho, city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him: «This is the country which I promised an oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying: I shall give it to your descendants. I have allowed you to see it for yourself, but you will not cross into it»” (Dt 34:2-4). Here, therefore, the Lord our God has taught Moses to believe and to hope. As the *Letter to the Hebrews* comments: “All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognising that they were only strangers and nomads on earth” (Heb 11:13). The reopening of this Place for visits, for pilgrimages, and for prayers is at the same time a gesture of faithfulness to the origins of our faith, a gift for our present, but also a commitment for the future.



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It is a gesture of faithfulness to the origins, a gesture of memory. It is not just simply a question of passion for archaeology. Archaeology is never an end in itself: it is the precious attempt to rediscover the solid foundation, the roots of our culture and of our faith, to continue to believe and to live in the present while building the future. In a world in which we are tempted to forget our history, we can also lose the reasons for continuing to live and to hope, and we can also lose sight of the roads that lead us to build a better future. Returning and coming up to stop on Mount Nebo implies rediscovering the sense of our committed and serious journey, the ability to work and to dedicate our energies, like Moses did, in order to leave as a legacy to the future generations new possibilities of life and hope. The past cannot and should never become a refuge, and even less a prison in which we close ourselves because of distrust or fear of the other, or of the future. The past contains the roots from which we can draw life and energy in order to build the present and to prepare the future.

The reopening of this Sanctuary, therefore, is also a gift for the present. We are receiving back not simply a space, rather an invitation and a way of life. Here and now, in fact, all of us can rediscover, in silence and prayer, in contemplation and meditation of the Word of God, the good taste of a life that is lived in faith and in giving freely, in the gift of self for the other, to the point of death, while waiting for the future of God with hope. For those who believe, the present with its difficulties, and sometimes, with its impossibilities, is not the ultimate word to which we must submit or adapt. It is rather the way, the waiting, the promise that drives us to stay together and to work together, strengthened by the Word of God which encourages and pushes us to conversion and commitment. These are the promises, the true and authentic promises for a future of justice and peace. We cannot win over the conflicts that are still saddening us simply through agreements or ceasefires or divisions from others, as Pope Francis reminds us so forcefully. We can build peace by loving and working in unity, by welcoming and accompanying the others with their sufferings and their fatigue, to the point of placing the good of the others above our private and personal interests, and by obeying, despite the diversity of our situations, to the Word of the one and only God, just as Moses did.

In this way, from this Holy Place, we can restart our journey of hope for a future of serenity and peace. Here, where Moses died and was buried, where he greeted from afar all that for which he had lived and suffered, we can learn how to live by opening roads, constructing bridges, preparing a future which, maybe, we will not possess, but which will certainly come to be thanks to our prayers and to our commitment of faith and hope. The future of peace and good which we all long for is the fruit of our daily commitment as men and women who work with patience, dedicating our hands and our hearts to our work. The labours and sweat of the brow of so many, which are often hidden, and have made it possible for us to celebrate today's feast, even when these persons could not foresee such



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a result, are the most beautiful and true proof of what we are saying. While we look with gratitude at their achievements, we welcome their invitation to continue to rebuild and restore the ancient ruins, so that they may return to become once again places of life for the present and for the future (cfr. Is 58:12).

Thanks once more for your presence here this evening! It is a presence which honours us and fills us with joy. Thank you.