

Text of Pope Benedict XVI's Speech to Franciscans of the Holy Land at Moses Memorial Basilica
9 May 2009

Father Minister General,
Father Custos,
Dear Friends,

In this holy place, consecrated by the memory of Moses, I greet all of you with affection in our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank Father José Rodríguez Carballo for his warm words of welcome. I also take this occasion to renew my gratitude, and that of the whole Church, to the Friars Minor of the Custody for their age-old presence in these lands, their joyful fidelity to the charism of Saint Francis, and their generous concern for the spiritual and material welfare of the local Christian communities and the countless pilgrims who visit the Holy Land each year. Here I wish to remember also, with particular gratitude, the late Father Michele Piccirillo, who devoted his life to the study of Christian antiquity and is buried in this shrine which was so dear to him.

It is appropriate that my pilgrimage should begin on this mountain, where Moses contemplated the Promised Land from afar. The magnificent prospect which opens up from the esplanade of this shrine invites us to ponder how that prophetic vision mysteriously embraced the great plan of salvation which God had prepared for his People. For it was in the valley of the Jordan which stretches out below us that, in the fullness of time, John the Baptist would come to prepare the way of the Lord. It was in the waters of the River Jordan that Jesus, after his baptism by John, would be revealed as the beloved Son of the Father and, anointed by the Holy Spirit, would inaugurate his public ministry. And it was from the Jordan that the Gospel would first go forth in Christ's own preaching and miracles, and then, after his resurrection and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, be brought by his disciples to the very ends of the earth.

Here, on the heights of Mount Nebo, the memory of Moses invites us to "lift up our eyes" to embrace with gratitude not only God's mighty works in the past, but also to look with faith and hope to the future which he holds out to us and to our world. Like Moses, we too have been called by name, invited to undertake a daily exodus from sin and slavery towards life and freedom, and given an unshakeable promise to guide our journey. In the waters of Baptism, we have passed from the slavery of sin to new life and hope. In the communion of the Church, Christ's Body, we look forward to the vision of the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, where God will be all in all. From this holy mountain Moses directs our gaze on high, to the fulfilment of all God's promises in Christ.

Moses gazed upon the Promised Land from afar, at the end of his earthly pilgrimage. His example reminds us that we too are part of the ageless pilgrimage of God's people through history. In the footsteps of the prophets, the apostles and the saints, we are called to walk with the Lord, to carry on his mission, to bear witness to the Gospel of God's universal love and mercy. We are called to welcome the coming of Christ's Kingdom by our charity, our service to the poor, and our efforts to be a leaven of

reconciliation, forgiveness and peace in the world around us. We know that, like Moses, we may not see the complete fulfilment of God's plan in our lifetime. Yet we trust that, by doing our small part, in fidelity to the vocation each of us has received, we will help to make straight the paths of the Lord and welcome the dawn of his Kingdom. And we know that the God who revealed his name to Moses as a pledge that he would always be at our side (cf. Ex 3:14) will give us the strength to persevere in joyful hope even amid suffering, trial and tribulation.

From the earliest times, Christians have come on pilgrimage to the sites linked to the history of the Chosen People, the events of Christ's life and the nascent Church. This great tradition, which my present pilgrimage is meant to continue and confirm, is grounded in the desire to see, to touch, and to savor in prayer and contemplation the places blessed by the physical presence of our Savior, his Blessed Mother, the apostles and the first disciples who saw him risen from the dead. Here, in the footsteps of the countless pilgrims who have preceded us in every century, we are challenged to appreciate more fully the gift of our faith and to grow in that communion which transcends every limit of language, race and culture.

The ancient tradition of pilgrimage to the holy places also reminds us of the inseparable bond between the Church and the Jewish people. From the beginning, the Church in these lands has commemorated in her liturgy the great figures of the Patriarchs and Prophets, as a sign of her profound appreciation of the unity of the two Testaments. May our encounter today inspire in us a renewed love for the canon of Sacred Scripture and a desire to overcome all obstacles to the reconciliation of Christians and Jews in mutual respect and cooperation in the service of that peace to which the word of God calls us!

Dear friends, gathered in this holy place, let us now raise our eyes and our hearts to the Father. As we prepare to pray the prayer which Jesus taught us, let us beg him to hasten the coming of his Kingdom so that we may see the fulfilment of his saving plan, and experience, with Saint Francis and all those pilgrims who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, the gift of untold peace – *pax et bonum* – which awaits us in the heavenly Jerusalem.