

# HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

Franciscan Provincial Office  
47 Victoria Street, Waverley NSW 2024  
Telephone (02) 9369 9300 Fax (02) 9369 9322

---

## *To the people of the Church of Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2011 –*

Some years ago, the government of Israel declared Mount Tabor a “national park” and wants to do the same with Capernaum. Some want to subordinate other Holy Places to UNESCO, as if they were “cultural monuments.”

In a recent issue of *The Holy Land Review*, Fr David Jaeger OFM described the Holy Places as places of prayer, not amusement parks: “The Holy Places are places of prayer and they witness to the faith.” He made the telling point that “the Holy Places are private property of the Church bought over the centuries at great sacrifice. At additional sacrifice, they are being built up, administered and guarded by the Franciscan Friars – or, in other cases, by other Catholic bodies.”

“The Church implacably opposes designs to take over the Holy Places, in whole or in part”, writes Fr David. “The resources given by the faithful from around the Catholic world and the generous dedication of the Franciscan missionaries (along with others) should permit the Church to provide for itself. This is urgently needed so that, at least here, the Holy Places remain what they are: places for a meeting in time with Jesus Christ, the Divine Person who wanted to come and live in our dimension of space and time.”

In the Holy Land, “the Holy Places recall the great works of God, the very Mystery of Redemption. Here are the Holy Places *par excellence*, the prime example of what a ‘holy place’ is, a space transformed into an occasion of salvific grace. This does not mean that we do not want to welcome all who wish to visit these Places consecrated by the Redeemer of humanity. On the contrary, we warmly invite them, provided only there is no ambiguity about what they are coming to visit and about Whom they are coming to meet.”

Whom the pilgrims meet include also the Palestinian Christians, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Micheal Zoughbi of Bethlehem reports, “Still there are many people leaving the country because of the limited job opportunities that would provide income for their families. Apart from the political situation, living expenses are getting higher and higher.”

“We are happy to hear that our brothers and sisters in Australia are interested in the Holy Places, but it is not enough to pray for us in the Holy Land. We have various projects that would create job opportunities and better income for a large number of people, with your financial support. You can help a lot of our Christian families to stay in the country and to improve their life. We have many churches, but we don’t have enough people to attend the Masses. When you are planning to visit the Holy Places, we would love you not just to visit them like visiting a stone ruin or a monument or a museum, but also to meet us, the living stones.”

The Good Friday Collection is our Australian Catholics’ effort to ensure that the Holy Places remain places of prayer and of personal contact with our Redeemer, and also to support the local Catholics in giving heroic witness to their faith in the Lord Jesus. We rely on your generosity.

Signature

*Carl Schafer OFM*

*Friar Carl Schafer OFM*

*Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)*