

The documentary movie about the revival of the ancient monastery of Deir Mar Musa Al-Habashi by an international monastic community.

The Monastery of St. Moses Al-Habashi, i.e. the Abyssinian Monastery, is located between **Damascus and Homs, in the spurs of the Kalamun Mountains**. According to legend, the hermitage of a certain **Moussa** was located in these places.

*"...The black-skinned **St. Moses the Abyssinian**, his original name Musa came from **Africa, or rather Abyssinia**. There he was a local, cruel ruler, then repenting, he migrated to Palestine, where he lived and later died..." - says **Father Paolo, abbot of the monastery**, "...His name carries the name of the monastery - **Mar Musa**..."*

The story of the dramatic journey of the enlightenment of St. Moses of Abyssinia, who became a **faithful defender of Christ**, will be continued by the **priest of the Church of Mar Georgius (St. George), from the city of Sadad* - Abu Addula**. The story of how a big, strong and self-confident man came to faith and found a refuge for himself among the mountains and stone cliffs.



In this church is a unique wall painting of St. Moses of Abyssinia himself, created during the construction of the temple itself during the **reign of Bishop Sarukhan**. Sarukhan served in the church of Mar Musa and assisted **Bishop Ibrahim Al-Yaziji** in the construction of this temple and the painting of its walls.

It is known that from the beginning of the 6th century AD, the monastery played a rather important role in the spiritual life of **Central Syria**. **Pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem** stayed here. However, with time it fell into disrepair. From the middle of the IXX century it became uninhabited and began to collapse.

Father Paolo is an Italian by birth, originally from Rome: *"The first time I came to the monastery, or rather what remained of it, was at night. It happened in 1980...I entered the church: there was no roof, the stars were looking inside. I had a flashlight in my hands,*

I looked and saw the painting on the walls. It was badly defaced. The frescoes looked at me, and seemed to say: can anything be done, in this abandoned place, from these ruins..."



"Already in the morning, near the ruins of the monastery, I discovered the ancient graves of the local monks. And I felt that these were my companions on the road ...and I decided to stay here forever..."

After some time, Paolo managed to gather a group of like-minded people: they set up tents, acquired a modest household, and all together, immediately began to work on the restoration of the monastery, without forgetting about prayer.

Since 1991, Paolo and the community he leads, which is now part of **the Syro-Catholic Diocese of Homs**, have been here permanently. The sisters live in the convent and the brothers live in caves equipped for permanent housing.

Today the monastery is being revived by the work of an **international community, which includes citizens of France, Italy, Switzerland, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon**.

Some of the guests come here, live in the monastery for 10 days, a month, two, three, pondering whether the Lord agrees with their decision.

The community, at first glance, lives like medieval monks, subsistence farming and spending time in prayer. At the same time, however, computers and solar panels, a cable car and an artesian well with water supply and sewage system accompany the traditional monastic way of life.

"Living here, far away from civilization," say the monastery's inhabitants, "we are still children of our time, thinking and acting like our contemporaries. At the same time, we acquire new, own experience, and gradually create our own order of life in the monastery, corresponding to the inner world of everyone. For example, wants to fast - fast. You want to pray twice: in the morning and in the evening - pray. And those who come to us from the city live with practically the same daily routine as they do at home. There is not much difference.

The only thing we all can't afford is night vigils, since we feed ourselves and have to work hard.

How do we create our charter? Discussed: how do we understand the concept of poverty? How do we understand the virtue of temperance? What is our obedience to the Lord Jesus, what is our prayer, etc.? Little by little we began to write down our rules and discuss them together. One day you will say: "Congratulations on this charter..."



In a small room of the monastery church, on his first visit, Paolo discovered frescoes of biblical subjects on the walls, which had been badly damaged by time and were fairly well preserved. The manner of writing of unknown artists very closely resembled, according to Paolo, the Byzantine style.

Later, experts found that here is the only one in the world, such a **large collection of ancient Jacobean wall paintings of the 11th-12th century, which have survived to this day: the image of Jesus; the Evangelists writing the Gospel in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic; a very rare plot of women - saints; the Annunciation and the image of the terrible judgment and, finally, the image of Moses of Abyssinia.**

"The frescoes are painted on a thin layer of fresh plaster mixed with gypsum and carefully laid on a stone wall. This layer, so thin and vulnerable, seems to complete the whole appearance of the church and gives meaning to the stones of which it is built and to the rock on which the church itself rests. These frescoes depict a picture of human existence as it was seen by the artist through the prism of his age and faith... That is why the images are so valuable to us. This is real art, and it teaches people, our contemporaries, to live in the world of art.

Church painting is not only meant to simply make the church beautiful, but also our lives beautiful. Of course, we do not know how to restore frescoes, it is very specific and delicate work. That is why we invited masters from Italy. We even had to create special courses for Syrian restorers in Damascus. Now the first stage of restoration has been

completed. If God permits, we will soon begin the second phase with the help of the European Community. Restoration workshops will also be established. I hope that we will complete this work before the end of the murals”.



We will finish our story about the frescoes in the town of Sadad, an ancient town on the border of the desert, where the heirs of those Arabs, the Jacobite Christians, who once founded the monastery of Mar Musa, live. Here we will be introduced to a very unusual style of church painting. The frescoes of the local church, although executed 7 centuries later, are similar to those of Mar Moussa.

Father Paolo and his associates believe that the future of the Christian Church is in ecumenism and call for all Christians to unite, setting aside differences.

*“We believe,” say the monastery's residents, “that all Christian denominations are united by faith in the one Christ and here in the Middle East, being as it were in the Islamic ocean, are called to preach peace, modesty, openness, dialogue, mutual understanding and love of neighbor ... regardless of their religion”***

** Sadad is the biblical Cedad. The western part is inhabited by Orthodox Christians (descendants of the Hassanids), the eastern part by Jacobites. The frescoes in the story are in the church of Mar Georgius (St. George), built on the site of an ancient temple. The teller is the local priest Abu Addula.*

*** Evening service in the church of the monastery, prayer - Our Father. Christ is risen (in Syriac language).*