

JULY 4 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

The story of Abraham and Sarah, although 4,000 years and more old, is so relevant today that you can almost imagine Abraham and Sarah living right next to this Loreto Abbey, right down 101 Mason Boulevard, just around the corner.

Sarah dies. Abraham is so much in love with her that he wants to give her what all of us want to do for our beloved one — a proper burial in the right place. And so, he does two things. One, he makes sure that the land where he is going to bury Sarah belongs to him. Nobody can come later on and say, "This land is my land, and therefore, you have to take these bones away." The second thing is, very often, they take the bones back to the homeland. We see that later on with Joseph. After 400 years in Egypt, he says, "Make sure that my bones are taken back to the land that was promised."

Abraham makes sure that Sarah is buried on land called Kiryat Arba, which means the "City of Four," or next to Mamre, present-day Hebron. We know Hebron as a place of reverence and respect because here are the burial sites of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with their wives, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah.

If you go to Hebron, even till today, it is a place of tension. I remember on two of our pilgrimages, as we were going in bulletproof buses, we were turned away because there was great tension there. But I had the privilege of going there with a friend of mine, right to the spot. We entered through the Muslim gate, and the first tombs we saw were those of Jacob and Rebekah. In that same large room, we went further north and saw the tombs of Abraham and Sarah, and still further north, Isaac and Rebekah.

They are huge, big mausoleums, 24 feet tall and six feet wide. As I went in, I saw the Muslims with great reverence and respect for this holy

place. Then we crossed the road, showed our passports, and got into the Jewish synagogue, and we saw the Jews praying with great faith at the site of these tombs.

I thought to myself, two great religions, with great faith, both Semites, and I prayed that one day, we as Christians, Muslims, and Jews may worship in one place. As one of the sociologists said, these are one people; they have the same faith, a different way of looking at God. It's religion that separates them, because religion is man-made, with rules and regulations that say, "This is the only way you can meet God."

Then, we come to the second layer. Abraham sends his servant to get a wife from the homeland. We know that marriage is so difficult. It has issues of children, religion, sexual intimacy, finances, communication. So, if you have people from different races, different cultures, and different traditions, you're going to have a lot of tension in marriage. Abraham wants a wife from his homeland.

But the other side is also true. I, myself, from reality, can say I have 13 nephews and nieces. Ten of them are married. We have a regular United Nations. There's a Korean, there's an Iraqi, there are two from the Caribbean, four are married to different people from Europe. All of them were born and brought up here. Every time I go to their place, it's a sense of joy and peace, and it's a veritable surprise to my palate with new tastes and a new respect for the people.

So, both sides can be taken into consideration, and a pledge or a statement can be made for both sides.

Finally, we have Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac comes and sees Rebekah, and falls in love with her, without knowing where she came from. Rebekah, on the other hand, also sees Isaac, and she dismounts from the camel and, according to tradition, covers her hair, her face, and goes to meet

him through an intercessor. It seems so providential, and that is exactly how God leads us together in every vocation.

We think it's limited only to priests and religious sisters, but it's related to every one of us. Have we ever looked and said, whether we are married, whether we are religious, whether we are single, that God has chosen this for me? If we truly realize that, then we would be really happy people.

That's exactly what happens in the Gospel today. When Jesus calls Matthew, he listens, his mind is open, he listens to God's calling, and he is a happy person indeed.

May we look to God and realize that God is calling us for something special in this life. May God bless you all.