

I begin with a confession. When I began to prepare this homily, it took me some time to see the connection between the reading from Genesis to the readings from Romans and Matthew. The connection between Romans and Matthew was rather more apparent. But in time, with thought and prayer, and no small time with Father Google, I began to see how all three are linked.

First of all, it is important to understand why it was so critical that Isaac not marry a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites worshiped idols and as descendants of Ham, the Canaanites were cursed. In order to be faithful to God's covenant with Abraham and to the promise that he would be the ancestor of a multitude of nations, Isaac had to procreate with one who was not cursed and was in the faith; hence, Abraham sending Eliezer, his servant to the land of Abraham's kindred to find the bride for Isaac. In addition in journeying to the land of Abraham's ancestors, Eliezer's strategy to find such a bride was to pray: *'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, let her be the woman*

whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.' And so Rebekah appeared. When Rebekah is asked by her brother and her mother. *Will you go with this man?* She replied immediately, *I will.* The theme of the passage is faith in action and trust in God. Eliezer prays; Rebekah appears, and she takes a leap of faith to say I will. She agrees to leave all she knows for a land and a man she does not know. The providence of God is with them to provide comfort, blessing, and future. Isaac takes Rebekah for his wife and God's covenant with Abraham comes to pass; he becomes the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

Now we jump ahead more than 2000 years to Paul's letter to the Romans written in either 56 or 57 of the Common Era. Our passage this morning is an awkward one taken out of context as it is. First of all, although Paul says, *I do not understand my own actions, For I do not what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* When Paul speaks of actions he speaks of doing "the very thing". But when he speaks of his state in the flesh he speaks of sin, but sin as a noun, a state, not as a verb. The actions that he hates are not sins, they are

consequences of a state of being in sin. Do please remember that sin is the opposite of righteousness and righteousness simply means being in right relationship with God and with each other. So sin is obviously being out of right relationship, which may be manifest in all manner of unfortunate conduct.

In the previous chapter, Paul says *Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin.*

Paul begins the following chapter right after our reading with the following: *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

So all this really means is that through our baptism we are in Christ Jesus. If we are faithful and trust in God as did Eliezer and Rebekah, we shall be delivered from alienation from God and neighbour because righteousness is now open to us.

Paul is also at pains to make it clear that while he is faithful to the law; it is not enough to spare him from alienation or as he describes it “this body of death”. *For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

There are some inflammable words in our passage most notably: flesh, members, body of death. For too many centuries, too many parts of the church have been obsessed with sexual sin. Paul gives them ammunition in these words in their English translations. But the words in the original text that Paul wrote in Greek have no specific sexual connotations. For example St. Paul uses the word *melos* which is translated member, but it does not refer simply to a sex organ, it refers to all the interdependent parts of the body: eyes, arms, legs, et cetera. When Paul speaks about the law of sin he is speaking about a force like gravity that draws us down

to rebellion and alienation; he is not speaking explicitly of a draw to carnal pleasure.

I am not suggesting that there are not sexual behaviours that are sinful, but they are no more sinful than acts of greed, violence, oppression or any of the other bad behaviours of which our baser selves are capable and which alienate us from God and neighbour. From the New York Times, *When a reporter on the papal plane returning from a trip to Africa asked [Pope Leo] about a controversy over the blessing of gay couples by priests, Leo said: “We tend to think that when the church is talking about morality, that the only issue of morality is sexual. And in reality, I believe there are much greater, more important issues, such as justice, equality, freedom of men and women, freedom of religion, that would all take priority before that particular issue.”* (The

New York Times, May 22, 2026, Pope Leo Chooses Social Justice over Pelvic Theology)

The obsession of placing a sexual connotation on Paul’s language robs it of its real power and says much more about the obsessed than it does about the Pauline text.

Let us move on to the Gospel reading.

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

If one does not wish to hear, or if one finds the message too demanding or too expensive, there are always a myriad of excuses to turn one's back. The excuses need not be well thought-out. As Jesus points out, they don't even need to be consistent.

Jesus thanks the Father that the message has been kept hidden from the wise and the intelligent. Is the hiding of the message not inherent in their wisdom and their intelligence, because Jesus just doesn't make any sense in conventional thinking? If I am powerful, why would I take the powerless into consideration? If I am rich, why would I choose to become poor? If I am beautiful, why would I show any regard for the plain? If I am threatened, I will curry favour with the powerful, why would I pay any attention to those more threatened than I? If I am among the first, why would I subscribe to a message that "the last shall be first?"

Jesus calling the “infants”, the “weary,” and those “carrying heavy burdens” is not literally true. Our Lord calls everyone. The burden of answering the call is just too great for some. There is too much to give up – think of the rich young man who went away sorrowful; think of the Sadducees who had made their accommodation to the Romans and were well rewarded; think of the Pharisees who knew only law without mercy to human need – starve or succumb to illness and death just because it is the sabbath and no one may help you.

So we get to the end of our reading with the famous line: *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” There is no greater truth in the Bible. The problem is that the hard stuff is long before taking up the yoke. The hard stuff is in all we have to be ready to give up – in material things, in status, in power, in money – that’s when the hard stuff hits. It is not that we necessarily have to give up everything, but we have to be ready to make the yoke the priority before which all else, if necessary, falls away. It doesn’t strain belief to know that if we can do it, if we like Eliezer and Rebekah have the faith and the trust, the yoke will, indeed, be easy and the burden

light. Because the things we may have to give up may well, in fact, be the heavy burden and the hard yoke. I cannot say with any integrity that I am entirely ready. Can you? Surely that is the only point of our lives in the faith – to strive to become ready. Amen.