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A child standing in the crowd shouted, “Look, the king is naked”

This line comes from a story about a king who wanted the most beautiful robes. I am sure many of you may have read this children story before. But for those of us who have not read or heard the story, a little summary may suffice.

There lived a king who wanted the most beautiful robes but none of his tailors could sew him the most beautiful robes. One day, someone appeared out of nowhere and convinces the king and his household that he can sew him the most beautiful robes.

He asked for a hall where he can sew, a sewing machine, fabric and all that he needed for the king's most beautiful robes. Even though everyone in the king's palace heard the sewing machine running with the king's tailor acting like he was busily sewing, but no one saw any fabric on the sewing machine, he also had the temerity to offer a progress report until one day he announced that the king's most beautiful robe was ready.

The king summoned all his subjects to come out and see him in his most beautiful robe. As he rode in his chariot and received homage from his subjects, everyone talked about how beautiful the robe was.

But this little boy who probably couldn't stand the blatant hypocrisy on display, felt it was about time someone told the king he was naked, and if no one will, he will. Because he had nothing to fear from the king

Is it not surprising that no one told the king he was naked? If no adult or even the queen could tell the king he was naked, then there must have been something about this king that crippled his subjects and even his wife from being honest with him.

It sounds like they did not even have the opportunity to say to their king and husband what they really wanted to share.

Fact is, when we operate under the culture of fear and trepidation, we function differently, we hardly feel free enough to share our deepest honest thoughts. The fear of harm or of whatever often reduces us into robots and diminishes any capability we have to be authentic to our God, our neighbors and ourselves.

That explains to me why the first line of angel Gabriel when he visited Mary with the Goodnews of the incarnation was, “Do not fear”, and when the angel appeared to Joseph, his first line was “do not be afraid.” You may ask yourself why should fear be that important and prominent, well, the fact is, we lose our ability to make concrete honest decisions when we are afraid. But if God wants to operate within the context of human freedom, then we need not be afraid in making choices nor does he need us to be afraid, because whatever choice we decide to make must be devoid of any coercion or fear. In the gospel, Joseph engages Mary, but after the engagement, he notices that Mary was pregnant. Disappointed as he might have been, he only had two choices; defy

conventional wisdom and cultural traditions and keep her and the child or act like anyone beholden to his culture and honorably let Mary go back to her parents. But as he ruminated about his two tough choices, an angel appears to him in a dream and implores Joseph to accept Mary and the baby because her conception was by the Holy Spirit. Even though Joseph was at liberty to say thank you very much Mr. Angel, but I have never in my life eaten anything that is unclean, yet he found real meaning and purpose in what the angel said and accepted both Mary and the incarnate Word as his.

And so to accept the Incarnate Word and make it ours like Joseph made the Word his, means we possess the ability and the freedom to detach ourselves from our own culture and to resist any elementary language that seeks to define us. We need and ought to find within ourselves the power to go beyond ourselves and our culture to figure out what the true meaning of life is and also the important things in life

To accept the Incarnate Word like Joseph did and to decide to live with it means we are not only willing to be open to the transforming power of the Word but we are willing to avail ourselves to experience that power and most importantly to be a conduit through which others can also experience the transforming power of the Word.

To accept the Incarnate Word and to actually decide to live with both the bearer of the Word and the Word itself means we will no longer be afraid to re-interpret the culture that has enslaved us for the common good of all people.

To an appreciable degree, this to me is what the incarnation represents, a conversation that turns our world upside-down, and also turns whatever we know about ourselves and our culture inside-out. We may not fully and always understand the multiple dimensions of a conversation that has the potential of changing our world but we can at least appreciate the transforming power of that conversation.

And to me any conversation regarding the incarnation is about the transformation of the human being into his or her fullest potential. That is why, Jesus could ask John's disciples to tell John what they see and hear, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have goodnews brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me. In other words, blessed is the one who also believes in this ongoing human transformation.

As to whether Joseph understood what the angel said or not, I do not know nor can I tell, but one thing I know is, Joseph opened his heart, his home, his mind, his pocket and his life to welcome a God who dared to be a human being. I hope I gather enough courage to open my heart, my mind, my eyes, my ears and my home to welcome this God into my space. But most importantly may I never be afraid to be honest with my king and tell my king he is naked if he is truly naked. Amen