

From My Bedside Folklore- In witness of my father's limp and scar

Fear and anger are quintessential twin vices of the Holy Week. With regard to fear, Jesus walks on water towards the scared disciples and reassures them, "it is I, do not be afraid" (John 6:20). This phrase "do not be afraid" has been repeated enough times in scripture to last us a daily reminder not to fear for one full year. The comforting message that we gather from all the places this phrase has been mentioned in scripture is that we should not be afraid not because there are no more things to scare us or because the world is less chaotic, or because we are grownups and should man-up! But because the Lord is by our side and He is our light and salvation (Ps 27), even in the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4-5)!

To the second vice, the damaging anger from Herod who was so determined to kill him, Jesus has no nice words to say. He offers an uncomfortable rebuke: "Go tell that Fox..." (Luke 13:32). Such a rebuke, but in a different version, is given to Simon Peter when he pulls Jesus aside to offer anger as a protection from death (Matthew 16:23) and later tries to make true his threat by cutting off Malchus' ear (John 18:10-11). Jesus' rebuke in response to anger is ultimately intended to bring both Peter and Herod down to humility and obedience to the Lord, not as a suggestion but as a command – as is seen when Jesus tells Peter: "Get behind me Satan" (Matthew 16:23).

The reality of many of us though is that fear is a permanent scar and anger an existential limp we encounter in so many areas of our lives. To some, fear and anger are so deep rooted because

of the hurts they endured as children; to others, it is the deceptions and physical and psychological harm inflicted on them by spouses or close relatives and acquaintances around them; and to others, it is the hurt or discrimination they face in their workplaces or even down the streets.

For my late father, fear and anger were existential vices throughout his adult life. In our bedtime stories, he often narrated to us that he was beaten and left for dead during the struggle for Kenya's independence and was later displaced from his ancestral land to go and work as a slave in the white settlers' farms of the Rift Valley, thus permanently losing and disorienting his (and our) ancestral heritage and origin. This was the genesis of his fear and anger. He lived with a physical limp and deep-rooted fear and anger all his life and although he became and died a Christian, he never overcame either his anger or his fear. In one episode, our herd's boy brought the animals home earlier than expected and this made my father very angry. Under the impact of that anger, he developed a stroke which precipitated his death within a week. Jesus comforts us with the greeting of "Peace be with you" and commands to humility and obedience as necessary and curative tools in our struggle with fear and anger.

As we approach the Passion of the Christ, may His Peace be with you and may He be your light and salvation (Ps 27). May you live in humility and obedience to Him whose death purchased us from the debt of sin.