

**WE'RE ALL  
GONNA DIE**  
BE NOT AFRAID?



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# We're All Gonna Die: Be Not Afraid?

Coronavirus has been officially declared a worldwide pandemic. There are quarantines and travel restrictions. Everything is cancelled.

Since millions of people count on me to inspire their faith. And since I do have me a Masters Degree in Theology (and not one of those jokey online degrees or wacky Catholic universities)...I want to help you with some reassuring thoughts.

And here we go: We're all gonna die!

The good news is, you already knew that. The only question is: are we all gonna die of coronavirus?

According to CNN, yes. And President Trump is killing me intentionally.

According to Fox, nope. There's just like an old person somewhere, but they were gonna die, anyway. So nothing to worry about.

Am I afraid? Yes.

Honestly, I'm pretty freaked out by the whole thing. And that's ok, because Jesus never said "Be not freaked out."

I'm not sure why I'm writing this. On Thursday morning, I was flying from NY to Florida and started putting my thoughts down. It's now Friday night. And in between giving a talk, sitting at the pool, eating, drinking, and sleeping, I've been doing this. There will probably be typos and ideas that don't totally make sense.

I thought of it as a devotional. But then I had to decide how many days of devotion. And what if I wrote a 10 day devotional, but we all died by the 7<sup>th</sup> day, then it was a waste of time. Plus, if I put all the really good content (as if there's "really good content" here) at the front, and had nothing good at the end...you'd be disappointed to have lived long enough to read it.

So read it all at once. Or spread it out over days. I don't care. You didn't pay anything for it.

# What. Me Worry?

St Padre Pio said “Pray. Hope. Don’t Worry.” And what I find most ironic is that he was Italian! As a ginzo myself, I’m like, what kind of Italian doesn’t worry? Telling a wop like me not to worry is like telling me not to be greasy. Or to not care about if the pasta is al dente or not.

So most of the time, I spend more time worrying than doing anything else in my life. I’ve been worried about germs for decades. And when it comes to coronavirus, I see people now starting to wash their hands? Well, I was ahead of the curve on this one. And been goofed on. I don’t want to say “I told you so”, but...well, I’ll let you say it. I was right.

Feel free to practice it yourself: “Lino was right. Lino was right.” The more you say it, the easier it’ll be to accept it in your heart.

So what I ask myself is: Am I worried about getting sick?  
Worried about dying?

I’m not afraid of dying. I’m afraid of sickness that leads to death. And there’s a huge difference between the two things.

It's been said that absence from the body means presence with the Lord. So I should look forward to death. But I don't. I'm Catholic, but I'm not a sadist. (Though, I admit, it's oftentimes tough to tell the difference between the two).

I could go all weird Bible scholar on you and tell you the etymology of the word afraid. And what it meant in Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic. But what matters right now: what does the word "afraid" mean to you?

It brings me anxiety. So then when God says "Be not afraid" ...but I am afraid. It makes me feel like I'm failing God.

I'm afraid. But I shouldn't be afraid because God is in charge. But like I said, I am afraid. But He told me not to be. So I'm disobeying Him by being afraid? Great, now I'm afraid and I'm disobedient. That sucks.

# C'mon, Man!

When it was evening, his disciples went down to the sea, embarked in a boat, and went across the sea to Capernaum. It had already grown dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. But he said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid." John 6: 16-21

Sometimes it doesn't feel fair for Jesus to say "Do not be afraid."

If I trapped you in a sauna for a few hours, let you out, and then said "Do not be thirsty" ...I think the fair response would be, "Then don't put me in a damn sauna!"

Well, in this case: Bunch of dudes in a boat. It's nighttime. The boat doesn't have electricity because, you know, first century problems. Wind is kicking up. Things are getting dicey. Then they see a dude walking towards them. On the water. I repeat: on the water.

2,000 years after the fact, it's become one of His most popular tricks. Back then, the whole "walking on water" concept was a

novelty. As faithful Jews, they would have been familiar with the ol' "Moses walked *through* water" business. But walking on it? This is all new material.

So they're rightfully kinda bugging out. Jesus is actually physically walking on water. And then He says to not be afraid?

Bud! Don't show up looking like a ghost, and be like "Sup, pigs? It's me." And then we're the bad guys for being afraid?

Don't be afraid? Well, don't show up looking like a ghost walking on water! You freaked us all out and now we're the bad guys because we're scared? C'mon, Man!

Jesus can say it as often as He wants, but there are situations that, quite frankly, we're going to be afraid. So if His main point is: I've got you. All I'm saying is, cool. But some situations are going to freak me out. And right now, the coronavirus is kinda freaking me out.

# Who's Your Daddy

An angel appears to Joseph to tell him Mary would be with child. Ok, cool. So put yourself in Joseph's shoes: an angel shows up.

"Hellooo...."

You're like, hey! This is what an angel looks like? Never seen one before. And since Joseph lived in a time before quality Italian art, Joseph really wouldn't have known what to expect an angel to look like.

The angel says: *"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid..."*

That may have been confusing for Joseph. Because, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph's dad's name was Jacob. And according to the Gospel of Luke, Joseph's dad's name was Heli.

So if I'm Joseph, I'd be like, "I'd appreciate you having the facts straight, angel. But I understand what you're getting after here: The Messiah must come from the lineage of David. And I'm in the family. So, oh, ok."

Now if an angel came to me and said “Lino, be not afraid of coronavirus”... I’d be like, ok. But not fair. You’re an angel. You can’t get sick. I’ve never seen an angel with purell or wearing a mask.

Anyway, back to Joseph. He lived in Nazareth; this little backwater town with just a few hundred people. Everyone knew each other. So finding out his betrothed was pregnant? Whether the child was from God or from Shlomo down the street... he had plenty to worry about. And be afraid of.

So the angel can say “do not be afraid” all he wants. But the angel doesn’t have bills to pay. And the angel wouldn’t be the one who has to figure out how to take Mary (and, soon, Jesus) to Egypt.

The way I look at it is that the angel was saying: Trust in God. And when you’re afraid, give it to Him.

By the way, an angel appearing to you also gives you a big boost of confidence. God took time to send me an angel to chat? I bet things will work out.

But angels don’t really show up for the rest of us. Which keeps the fears around.

My takeaway from the angel saying “Be not afraid”? It’s gonna be ok. But it isn’t going to be easy.

# Jesus Isn't Litigious

Saint John Paul II loved saying “Be Not Afraid!” In fact, I heard it from him so often that it was years later that I realized he lifted it from Jesus. I love that I heard it from JP II first. And he probably loved that Jesus wasn't litigious.

When he was elected to the papacy, John Paul II said: “Brother and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power...Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ.”

There's one thing I've learned about church leaders. And Church folks in general. Some may be smarter, or holier, or more virtuous or whatever. Which is obviously the case with JP II. But I don't think for a minute that he didn't have moments of doubt. And fear. And frustration.

Towards the end of his life, at his final public appearance, he was in the apostolic palace doing the Sunday Angelus. He was at the window, but he couldn't speak. He was visibly frustrated. If I told him, “Be Not Afraid!” he'd probably say, “Not helpful, Lino.”

Granted, he wouldn't be able to talk. But maybe he'd have written it.

The message I take from it is this: It's the unknown that is scary. The frustration of wondering what's next. Of course Saint John Paul II trusted in God, but he could trust in God and also be afraid of the future. How does he continue his ministry as the Successor of St Peter if he could no longer talk?

Him saying "Be Not Afraid" was: Don't be afraid to give yourself to God. Don't be afraid to open your heart to Christ.

It's the spiritual fear he was referring to. Don't be afraid to try Catholicism. To try Jesus. Don't be afraid to cast out into the deep. Don't be afraid to let God in.

But I'm pretty sure that he'd agree: If a menacing dog is running at me, I should be afraid. Otherwise it might jump up at me and bite my junk. Who knows what its gonna do. It's a dog. So yeah, be afraid. Just not afraid of following Jesus.

# Math Isn't My Strong Suit

I've heard it said that some form of "do not be afraid" appears in the Bible 365 times. Which sounds totally made up to me. Plus, why wasn't the Holy Spirit inspiring the writers to include it 366 times, if that's the case? Is it ok to be afraid on February 29 every 4 years?

Anyway, I don't have the time or energy to count how many times it appears. I'm about to die of coronavirus.

But no matter how many times it appears, it's ok to be skeptical.

Deuteronomy 31:8 says "It is the LORD who goes before you; he will be with you and will never fail you or forsake you. So do not fear or be dismayed."

Ok. But He isn't getting coronavirus first. Thus, I'm a bit dismayed.

Or Judges 6:23: "But the Lord said to him, 'Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die.'"

My point being, sure, the Bible says “do not fear”. But it also says “you shall not die.” Obviously, this just isn’t true. We’re gonna die. Not judging Judges. But be fair.

I’m not saying the Bible is lying to you. I just report. You decide. If a line like that brings you peace, great. But don’t walk around thinking God is going to protect you at all times.

Because if I read a passage and get all cocky, I might say “I’m gonna go taunt that bear. God will protect me.”

As you know, bears are fast. And God actually smiles upon bears killing humans. Weird, but Biblical. Check out 2 Kings 2:24 (sorry for the homework).

So screwing with a bear, or lion (poor Seigfried. Or Roy. Or whichever one it was), or whatever. Don’t say “God will protect me” and then make Him work. He expects us, now more than ever, to be cautious. To be smart.

# He's Called Great For A Reason

I used to live in Rome. I love bringing people to Rome on pilgrimage. And there are lots of stories that begin with “...there was a plague that killed this many people...” and “then, the black plague hit and killed half the population...” and I would always get a laugh out of it. Because I’m mean. And plagues seemed like a funny thing from a long time ago.

Not as funny now.

But in the sixth century, one of them plague things hit Rome. And they didn’t have Purell. Nor did they have Netflix or the internet – so being quarantined would have been horribly boring.

Thus, a Pope named Gregory took an icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus and hit the streets with it. Hoping to end the plague. (Tradition says St Luke himself painted the icon. And by tradition, I mean fake news. But whatever. It was a long time ago.)

As Gregory arrived at the Emperor Hadrian’s mausoleum, the Archangel Michael appeared. Michael put his sword away (hey oh) and this was a sign the plague would end.

People were pretty pumped about this and history knows him as Gregory the Great. If it hadn't worked out, he'd likely be known as Gregory The Guy Who Walked Around For No Reason And To No Effect.

The icon is now in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. And is known as the Salus Populi Romani: Protectress and Health of the Roman People.

The crazy thing to me is that plagues aren't so far away anymore. And when I hear of civilizations ruined, buildings destroyed, it's not just history. We are living history. We don't know how this story ends. Which is scary.

What I try to tell myself is the Church and the world have gone through crazy things before. And survived. It always seems to work out. (Except for the people who died in the plagues, of course. But let's not focus on them.)

Gregory didn't know how it would work out. But he gave it a try. And miracles do happen. Plagues do end. This, too, shall pass. I'm just trying not to pass along with it.

# Moses The Black

My evangelical friends right now are praying to the Father, in Jesus' holy name, through the power of the Holy Spirit...and trying to get rid of coronavirus that way. Of course, they have to make a "love donation" to some television ministry, and only then will their prayers be answered.

Catholics can go that route. But we've also got middle men. And women. The Saints. So I'm going to one of them to ask for the coronavirus to end. And if you already have coronavirus, maybe you should ask for their intercessions to get healed?

(Btw, if you've got the coronavirus, please quit reading this immediately. I'm not sure how the virus is spread, and in case it's somehow through the internet, I don't want to get it from you. Thanks in advance for not killing me.)

My advice is whenever you're looking for some divine assistance, through an intermediary, start by asking the intercession of someone not yet canonized a saint who's trying to make a name for themselves.

See, the beauty of 21st century Catholicism is the only way they get canonized is to have two solid miracles attested to their intercession.

Pick someone who has a decent chance. Don't start grasping at straws with dead people and asking for Sonny Bono's intercession. Or Gary Coleman. Or whoever. Be smart.

Find yourself someone who has been around for awhile. Maybe they've been beatified for centuries and need that one last push over the hump. Maybe they're an upstart of the last few decades still trying to get a foot in the door.

I'm going with Moses the Black. He's a canonized saint already, so he has nothing to prove. But he also is likely very bored because no one ever asks his intercessions. I'm asking his intercession to get rid of this thing.

Plus, I've always said I wanted my final words to be "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner." But it would be kinda funny if my last words were "Damn you, Moses The Black! Where were you when I needed you?"

# I'm Afraid Of Bad Lyrics

As I'm writing this, I'm listening to some music by my friend Matt Maher. If you've never listened to his music, check it out. If you've listened to him before, do so again. Or don't. Honestly, doesn't matter to me.

What does matter to me, at a time when I'm trying not to be afraid, is that you don't listen to one particular hymn: A song called "Be Not Afraid".

I've been required to sing this at church for decades. If you've never heard it: lucky. If you have, sorry. But I'm giving you some of the lyrics again. The chorus goes like this:

"Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come follow me. And I will give you rest."

I'm sure the writer of the song was a good person with good intentions. Some of you may even like this song.

My issue is that Jesus is supposed to be singing it to me. But He's not in the pew next to me singing. And He isn't the cantor. Thus, I'm singing it for Him. Which is confusing.

If I sing “Be not afraid. I go before you always...” Does that mean it’s Lino Rulli telling the person to be not afraid? Why would they listen to me?

And if the person next to tells me to follow them...and I do so, all the way home, that’s called stalking.

So I get the sentiment. But not the song.

Another lyric: “If you stand before the gates of Hell and death is at your side, know that I am with you through it all.”

Wait. Why am I at the gates of Hell if I haven’t died yet? That seems reversed. And also, why is death at my side? I’m not dead yet but it’s at my side like we’re square dancing? It’s all very confusing. I need good solid music right now.

# Crutches Are My Friend

At this point, I feel like my only option is to say, with all the passive aggressiveness I can muster, “You’re God, right? And you told me a bunch of times not to be afraid. That you’re in charge. Cool. I’ll be over there on the couch eating potato chips. Let me know when I can go back outside.”

Because either God is lying...which would not be cool. And lying also seems very Un-Godlike.

Or He’s telling the truth: He’s got this. In which case, He’s got it. So while I’ve got anxiety and stress, all I can do is all I can do. And I have to rely on Him the rest of the way. I’m broken and scared so I’m leaning on Him. Kinda like if I break my leg and need crutches to make things easier ...God is my crutch.

I’m from the great state of Minnesota and our Governor Jesse Ventura once said religion is a crutch for the weak minded. To which I agree. Though I realize he meant it as a negative, I take it as a positive. Which might be proof I really am weak minded.

But if God’s thoughts really are above my thoughts....then, yeah, I lean on Him. He’s my crutch.

So now is the time I can say I believe His Word. And trust Him. Not because it's easy. But because I don't really have many other options.

In fact, I've got two options:

- Believe God is telling the truth. And trust in Him.
- Decide that it's all made up and Jesus is a liar. In which case, I'm now an atheist.

And nothing would make me happier than if someone read this silly ebook, suddenly realized, "Hey, I don't believe in God anymore! Screw it!" and became an atheist because of me. "Thanks, Lino!"

At least I knew all this writing had an impact.

# I'm Not Dead Yet

Whether you read this in 10 minutes...or 10 days...the good news, you're not dead yet. Congrats.

And if you were hoping that on this final reflection, I'd give you an answer to how it all will work out... Well...wow. I feel bad for you.

You mistook me for a Catholic who pretends to have answers when their lives are actually just messes like the rest of us.

No one has an answer except God. And far as I can tell, He's not saying how it ends. Other than: "You're all gonna die!" So it's up to you if you want to be afraid or not.

But I'd like to end with this quote by Blessed Charles de Foucauld: "One of the things we absolutely owe our Lord is never to be afraid."

Never be afraid?!? Nope. Not helpful. #notmyblessed

And on that note, don't die! Or, at least, try to control your fear around it. That's what I'm doing.