

Dr.-Patrick-Manning-ICR-Interview-1.mp3

Host [00:00:00] All right. Greetings. I hope all is well for everyone in such difficult times. My name is Evando Thompson and I am a student journalist at Seton Hall, who will moderate several talks upon religion for Seton Hall's Institute of Communication and Religion. This afternoon we have Dr. Patrick Manning from our School of Theology. How are you Dr. Manning?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:00:22] Doing well, Evando. Good to be talking with you!

Host [00:00:25] Dr. Manning, could you please give the audience a brief background of yourself for us? I know you went to Notre Dame and you have a couple of degrees from them, so just can you talk about yourself and how you ended up at Seton Hall?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:00:37] Sure! Yeah. I wanted to be a teacher for a long, long time. I was very fortunate when I was in high school to go to a school that had an excellent theology department. Some teachers who I really looked up to and I just really loved those conversations that we had in those theology classes. So that kind of inspired me, planted a seed. And after after I finished up at Notre Dame, I did a Catholic service through teaching program called the Alliance for Catholic Education. It's kind of like a Catholic version of Teach for America. And so I I taught high school through them for a couple years studying education. But during that time, I got a bird's eye view of education across the country because we people in the program were sex all around, all around the country, different states, different places. And that kind of inspired me again and had me setting my sights. It gave me a feeling that I was being called to do something for the sake of Catholic education beyond my classroom. So that's sort of what sent me back to back to grad school, studying theology, studying education. And then was fortunate enough to end up at Seton Hall where I get to teach practical theology, including about religious education, and I fit in with the undergrads as well. Teaching journey once a year.

Host [00:02:16] Awesome. Awesome. Sounds like you are very passionate about what you're doing. It sounds like you like your career. So I'm very glad to hear that. And I hope to be in that position one day for sure. Today will we will discuss around the theme centered of finding and sharing inspiration amidst crises. Before we begin, is there anything that you would like to mention? Dr. Manning?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:02:39] No, let's dig in.

Host [00:02:41] All right. And I know you're quite the journalist yourself. I did see that you wrote for the Catholic publication called "Young Millennial" back in 2017, and I want to dove into something you wrote recently for Seton Hall's website, which are the "Five Tips for Finding God Amidst Crisis". Right after that you state that a lot of people believe God to be absent during these times as they search for him. You say that your tips are not quote on quote tips persay, because understandably, there's no quick fix for a pandemic. Can you just elaborate on how you formulated those five?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:03:19] Sure. Part of it is Seton Hall asked for faculty to contribute what we could to speaking out of our area of expertise to help people in the midst of the crisis. You know, they suggested five and so, I mean, there's you know, they could have written three. I could have written 20 things. These are five that seemed somewhat important to me and these emerged out of a lot of my own research and reading and sort of personal practice in the background. But more recently, these have come out of

conversations with colleagues and friends and family and just talking with people about what they're experiencing in the midst of a pandemic, and you know just kind of my own experience and trying to make sense of things and really craft a new lifestyle that helps us to adapt to the situation that we find ourselves in.

Host [00:04:28] And the first tip that you offer is to find unique ways that God may be working with us in this crisis. I just want to talk about the phrasing of or the wording of something that you use. You said turning catastrophe in a cause for celebration. So I know a lot of times in Catholic teaching or in Christian teaching in general, you know, the people, the higher ups, they always say God, you know, serves us in mysterious ways. We find different avenues to which, you know, there there can be, you know, a higher power that's helping us out. So can you just elaborate on on why you chose to use those words?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:05:13] Yeah. You know I mean, for the Christian faith, I mean, this is really, this is the story of human history, which is that God has a way of bringing good out of suffering. Bringing good out of evil, including the evil that we sort of inflict upon ourselves. Know, this is where we're now in the midst of Easter time. And, you know, this is what we celebrated at Easter, is that human beings that had turned away from from God, in fact we believe that that human beings actually killed God on the cross. And so it's kind of hard to imagine something more catastrophic or terrible than that. And yet it was God who used precisely that. God used precisely the cross in order to bring about the salvation of the world. And so, you know, we could we could if we had if this was a hundred part series, we could go through all of scripture and kind of look at all the times that God has done similar things and look at world history and do the same. But this is how God works. And so it's I'm not at all going out on a limb to say that even though this feels like a crisis, and it is and a lot of people are are really suffering. We have ample reason to believe that that God is going to be able to to bring good out of it. The question is, do we have the eyes to see it, and are able to recognize what what might be happening?

Host [00:07:00] I know for the second point you did offer, this is a time for sabbath rest. I know sort of, maybe like my generation or, you know, the millennial people at high school, people, you know, in college students, they're sort of moving towards maybe the more agnostic mindset or like not really valuing religion, as you know, maybe the 70s or 80s did. In the second point you wrote that sabbath day, like although a day of rest was was commonly observed in the United States today, many of us treat it as just another day to get things done? So do you think now that people are, you know, in their homes a lot more, obviously everybody social distancing and stay at home orders, do you think now people will have that time to kind of reflect and see God a little bit more?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:07:50] Well, it's you know, it's for sure that people have more time. And by that, I mean a lot of people, of course, you know, we have our emergency workers and our essential workers who many of them working more than they ever did before. And so this is not a time for rest and relaxation for them. But for many of the rest of us, we you know, we're doing our our daily commute. We have fewer meetings on our on our schedules. And so we do find ourselves, many of us, with more time. But that is the question is how we're how we're going to use the time. You know, we we could very easily just go on a Netflix binge like we have never done before to try and fill up that time. Or we can take it as an invitation to to spend our time very differently than we have before, to really take this opportunity to do the kinds of things that gives rest to our souls. So things like real I mean, actually moving through our data at a slower pace taken, you know, it makes me glad to look outside and I see a lot more people walking and riding bikes than we typically do. So that's a wonderful thing. But also, it takes more time for, you know,

maybe reading and writing and reflection and longer conversations, deeper conversations and even prayer, as I suggest later on in the article.

Host [00:09:29] You I kind of want to go to what I thought was the most like touching part of this whole tips guide, the fifth point where you said "the greatest human desire is to be loved. Pandemic did disrupt many of our lives, but it can't and will not stop us from communicating our love to one another." So I personally feel that this time is definitely a time where we need to strengthen those bonds with the people that are closest to us, you know, touching our loved ones. So how do you think this will positively encourage that and induce us to, you know, have more time to spend with the people that we live with?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:10:11] Yeah, yeah. You know, again in the article, I use language like invitation and opportunity because it's not a given that that we're gonna use this that we're going to use this time well. So it's you know, on the one hand, you know, many of us might find this to be difficult if we're you know, we're kind of in close quarters with our family members there. You know, there's the same familiarity breeds contempt. And, you know, even for those of us who are well intentioned, it can be tough when you're right on top of each other and you're seeing too much of each other day in and day out. There was, I have to check this out, but a friend mentioned to me that that in China, there were they were actually saying after the quarantine was lifted that there was sort of a spike in the number of people filing for divorce.

Host [00:11:14] Wow.

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:11:15] You know, it's sort of too much time together. And again, I hope I'm not spreading misinformation and you can fact check that, but this is what I'd heard before. But this is the danger that, you know, we don't use the time well. So how do we use it? Well well, it's I mean, I think even as we were isolated from one another. I mean, it's so fortunate that I mean, you, Evando, you and I right now, you know, we're talking across many state lines having a conversation thanks to this technology. And you know, here at Seton Hall a lot of our our faculty have really risen up to the challenge to keep keep moving on with their classes. And students are doing the best they can with it. And, you know, we have the same benefit when it comes to our families. I mean, I'll I'll say for myself that there's times that a blessing that I've I've had conversations with a bunch of people who I usually don't get to talk to. And people are just more available right now. So it's it's a real opportunity to spend that quality time with with one another. Because you know that one of my other areas of research is the science of happiness and how that interfaces with with the Christian faith. And one of the most significant findings to come out of that research is that our our relationships are the most important thing when it looks at are health and our well-being. So this is it is it's a real time, a real opportunity to invest in our relationships.

Host [00:12:54] You just go off to those relationships, want to talk about the relationship that Catholics have with the church, because I know I was on campus who are both right around when we had to we had to evacuate. So like right before like all students had to leave that's, you know, around the time that I left. I stayed a little bit longer. But I did notice that there wasn't any thing or any mass is going on on campus, of course. But they were offering people to kind of go online and, you know, try to, you know, still have the connection with the service and things like that. I just want to see, like, how do you how have those been administered? What's different?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:13:39] Yeah, yeah. You know, a lot of our people working in the church, they've you know, they've they've had to scramble like we have in the academic world to figure out how to minister to people. My wife actually works in a local parish, and so they as many parishes have they been livestreaming masses and livestreaming other events, reaching out to people and on social media. You know, Pope Francis he had this really remarkable address a number of weeks ago, this Urbi at Orbi address when he was speaking and offering a blessing to the city of Rome and the whole world. And one of his final statements in that address was to be open to the Holy Spirit and to make room for creativity in our lives. But within the churches as well. So it's you know, I mean, things are even even after things more or less go back to normal. I don't think things are are ever going to quite go back to the way they were after after this pandemic. And I think Pope Francis is putting out that that challenge. And that when we go back to say that we make the challenge a positive one, that we you know, we've had to adapt on the fly down to living in isolation and trying to carry on via online for many things. There again, there is there is an opportunity here to think about how we can better connect with each other, how we can be more creative in the way that the church reaches out to people, reaches out to the world, serves the needs of the world. So there's there's there's an opportunity here if we if we want to take advantage of it.

Host [00:15:33] I don't know, if you get the chance to see it, but South Orange did make national news headlines with the way that one of its churches held their service. They had pictures to represent the place in which the normal church goers would sit. What do you think about that?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:15:51] I did see that.

Host [00:15:51] Is it positive way to kind of inspire people like, hey, we're we're still in this together. Is it, do you think that is something I should still go on everywhere?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:16:00] Yeah, absolutely. You know, it's you know, I was I was just having a conversation with my wife, who, as I said, works in a church. Right before we started this interview. And I was saying something to this effect that, you know, we we all find great right now. So many of us find ourselves in isolation and we're experiencing how difficult that could be to be cut off to one another. And so I love to see things like that. Yeah, I did see that about the pictures of the parishioners in the pews of the church. I felt that was wonderful. You know, it's great to see the way that the different churches are there. You know, they're trying to create spaces online for people to, you know, to hang out and have some kind of fellowship and talk with each other and be together. You know, I know like some some churches are, it's not just the priest on the camera the whole time. They're having parishioners film themselves at home and, you know, to welcome each other to the services and to build that kind of community online. So these are all great things that we're doing for the people who are normally in the pews. I would love to see the church take advantage of this moment and recognize that we're all feeling, this isolation right now, but there are some in our society who have been practicing involuntary social distancing well before this. You know, the the poor, the elderly, the immigrants on the margins of our society who are cut off in some ways because of because of their situation. I would love to see some of this creativity that's being exercised right now employed to reach out to those people who are isolated even when there is a pandemic going on.

Host [00:18:01] I guess a lot of things seem so repetitive in the times of this crisis. So maybe you can offer, you know, some guidance for listeners that they may be Catholic or

just, you know, deeply religious in general. What's a day in the life of Dr. Manning and his wife like?

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:18:21] Yeah! You know what its a good question. I'll try and generalize so it's not so specific to us. But I would say to start, you know, I've heard a lot of comments about right now, it's like Groundhog Day. You know, so many people say, like, you know, people lose track of what day it is. Every day just kind of feels like the same. And I have to say that that has not been my experience. And I I feel that I partly have, you know, my Christian faith to thank for that, because one of the great aspects of the Christian life is that life is not just flat. It's not just one day after another that we you know, we celebrate different seasons. So, you know, right now we've just come out of this season of Lent and now we're experiencing this this time of Easter. And so kind of moving from this period when we're encouraged to reflect on our sinfulness of suffering in the world and our need for salvation into Easter when we now get to sort of celebrate the joy of what God has done in our lives. So we move through these different seasons and even within the day, you know, I think a lot of people know that that Muslims, observant Muslims, one of the five pillars is that they say they pray five times a day. But actually, there's a similar thing in the Christian tradition. There is this thing called the literature of the hours. We as Christians are encouraged to pray at different times throughout the day. One way one priest recently explained that to some of us is that it's like if you picture telephone wires or something being supported by those by those posters, those poles, every so often it's kind of those moments of prayer throughout the day, they give some structure to it. So that's kind of marked the passage of time and give a rhythm to life so that it doesn't feel like the hours of the day just just wearing. So so you asked about me specifically. So without going into too much boring detail because I'm an academic and I spend a lot of time with books at a desk, which is not interesting to anyone. But typically, I wake up where we have our little kids, you know, so we get them up and dressed. And in bed I take some time for prayer before before I get to work. And then all of my classes are out class prep to do or something else. I'll break in the middle of the day, try and have have lunch with the kids again, have a shorter time for prayer before I kind of continue on just, you know, do some more work in the afternoon and then hopefully in the in the late afternoon or evening I'll go for a bike ride or go for a jog with my daughter, kind of get out, get some exercise. We have dinner together and then the normal sort of baths and bedtime routine with the kids. I take some more more time for prayer and then, you know, kind of have an hour or so to just kind of hang out and and talk and spend some time with my wife before we return.

Host [00:21:55] You know, what I liked about the whole setup is it wasn't boring at all for me. But what I really do appreciate was that your day seems structured and I think you were saying how with the hours of liturgy, with the, you know, the praying in Catholic faith. Most people would think that, you know, Muslims are the only ones who pray multiple times a day. It's interesting because if there's structure to your day, then maybe, you know, things don't seem as lost whereas you're just rambling, trying to find, as you mentioned before, just a random Netflix show to binge. And so it seems that, you know, if there's a little bit more structure, you can you can see why you can keep track of what's going on.

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:22:35] Yeah, I do. I think it's really I think it's really helpful for us.

Host [00:22:41] Can you just, because I know you did at the beginning you said you could have three, you could wrote twenty. Can you just mention a few more tips that you didn't maybe put on this list that they could have went,.

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:22:52] Oh, boy, oh, boy, I don't know. I might have I might have to think some more. Because, I mean, these five came together for me pretty easily once I sat down to work on it, because I think the main things that that I felt were important to say or I mean, one just to be on the lookout for for what good might come out of this situation. And to be honest, I mean, you know, we might not recognize a lot of that until the thing is over. We tend to see more things more clearly after the fact. But I also wanted to offer some some practical advice coming out of the Christian tradition. So, you know, these these things about connecting with other people, about spending their time in prayer, about about taking the time that we need to rest. This this is nothing new. This is nothing that I'm making up. This is very these are very traditional Christian practices that are deeply embedded in the tradition. You know, I guess if if maybe I were to add something, I made the last point about connecting with with people. I say a bit in there about reaching out to those who are in need. And if I have more space, maybe maybe I would have elaborated on that again. Earlier, I mentioned Pope Francis's Urbi at Orbi address and he had this very interesting line that he didn't really develop very much where he said that that prayer and quiet service are victorious weapons. And I, you know, I've spoken a bit about prayer, but, you know the services. You know what can we do right now? But there are things that we can do to reach out to people. You know, we can we can call people up who we know or are isolated, you know, people who are elderly and, you know, really locked down and limited. We could kind of write letters.

Host [00:25:01] Yeah, you do mention here to write letters.

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:25:05] But also, you know, there are places that are still taking food donations and so, you know you can make a sleeve of sandwiches and drop it off. But if you know, if they're even if you feel like there's nothing you can do concretely, I do think this is a good time for us to really be reflecting on the society in which we live. And to think about the people who are most impacted by this in general, most impacted when when our society goes through a hard time. So I think that I mean, that's maybe one more thing I would give more emphasis to. It's just to be thinking about not only trying to kind of survive and get there ourselves, but to me to be thinking of other people. And and by the way, that's when we stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about others that actually tends to make us happier and much less anxious about our situation. So it actually benefits us as well.

Host [00:26:07] And that literally goes to my favorite, number three which is my favorite just to focus on what's most important in life. Definitely helping others can help you to do that. Thank you so much for your time. Alright, that will wrap it up for part one of the talks centered around the theme of finding and sharing inspiration amidst crisis. Thanks so much, Dr. Manning, for joining us. And I wish you the best going forward.

Dr. Patrick Manning [00:26:31] Thanks Evando, my pleasure to talk with you.

Host [00:26:32] All right. Thank you.