

Julia: [00:00:00] I'm here with Father Ricky Manolo, who is a Paulist priest, composer, theologian, and author. He is the recipient of the 2020 Distinguished Catholic Music Composer of the Year Award by the Association of Catholic Publishers and the 2018 Pastoral Musician of the Year Award by the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

Father Manolo studied composition and piano at the Manhattan School of Music. Theology at the Washington Theological Union and Liturgy, Culture, and Sociology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Currently, he is serving as chairperson of the Paulist Initiative on Polarization.

Welcome Father Ricky to Messy Jesus Business.

Fr Ricky: It is wonderful to be here, Sister Julia. Thank you for the invitation. I feel like it's a privileged moment for me to talk about, , my ministry, my thoughts about Christian life and everything else. So this is really welcomed.

Julia: Yeah, , and I've been hoping that you would come on , the show for about two years since I heard you speak at the National Religious Vocation Conference and you spoke about AI as it relates to the faith formation , to building community.

I remember I was so fascinated , and. we'll get into that later. Before we do, , I'd love to hear, how God's been working in your life , to help you become who you are today. My goodness, you're a man of many talents.

How did you have the courage to say yes to all these ways of sharing the good news?

Fr Ricky: Boy, how much time do we have? I think the short answer is that I've always felt, since I began my vocation journey, to simply respond to the signs of the times.

When I began to do theological studies at Washington Theological Union, during the 1990s. , inculturation was kind of like [00:02:00] the buzzword when I was a liturgical major. At least that was my passion. For me to, you know, look at culture and liturgy became something that was a very provocative question for me.

So I just began to read all these books by people like Ansel Chapunco or Mark Francis, people who I consider my mentors. That led , eventually, to my doctorate degree in Berkeley at Graduate Theological Union. And again, I was

responding to the signs of the times. I came in to that program with an interest on Asian American. Catholic liturgy and worship practices two years before that I, I lived in Asia for two years and, ,, studying the various rituals, doing some , ethnographic projects,

To help me prepare for my, a doctorate degree in Berkeley, , and I began to, teach classes and lecture on those topics about Asian American liturgies and worship, and then that also led to eventually taking courses at UC Berkeley on sociology.

And in the middle of my, , doctoral studies, I discovered,, cultural sociology. It was taught by a wonderful sociologist, Anne Swidler, that opened my eyes to another area of culture that I had not considered.

Before that time, my approach to culture was what I would call more of an anthropological approach to culture. So I was studying culture from, how different ethnic or racial groups, have their own rituals, how Catholic groups, , within the larger U. S. Catholic Church began to, enculturate their own rituals and all of those customs, , . Well, what Ann Swindler taught me was that The sociological approaches to culture included things like media or, things like fashion or technology or anything that has to do [00:04:00] with, social practices that people do, which in some ways, many ethnic culture groups share,

so that introduced me to, , looking at studies about the nuns, N O N E S. who may or may not, be, uh, affiliated to a particular religious institution. That led me to then give talks to what you heard when I gave that, , plenum address to the, , National Advocations about technology and media.

And all those areas, and now that's led me to look at polarization, because again, that's a social cultural phenomenon that's dividing our Catholic Church. And more recently, and maybe this is why I'm making my long journey, , AI, artificial intelligence, that is really, in my estimation, that really needs to, ,, be a great concern for both good and bad, but that we really need to focus on that area because I think it's going to , vastly, if not already, change our understanding of ministry , and Christian faith.

Julia: Yeah, wow. Thank you for that summary , of really how one thing leads to another, but ultimately \ what I'm hearing underneath it all , as you said, , it's attentive to the needs. , it's responding to the signs of the times. , it sounds as if your vocation, your discipleship is really informed by global social consciousness , the world is a complex place.

Things are shifting and changing and, , as a minister, you are responding and serving to that and hopefully, , supporting people as they , respond to it. I know that I've been privileged to pray with the music that you've written . in mass. , and it's, it's always a joy for me to, sing some of the songs you've written.

And I encourage our listeners to go to Catholic liturgies, or probably there's other denominations that use your hymns as well, to now look for your name as the songwriter and they might be surprised.

Fr Ricky: Yeah, it's kind of funny in that short bio I gave you, I didn't actually mention my, passion for liturgical music, because in some ways that was my first [00:06:00] passion.

, , , when I began to compose, which is probably the late 80s, but when I began to get published in the early 90s, there was a need to respond to the science of the times. , and at that time I, I saw a lack of, , liturgical songs. That were influenced or composed by Asian composers.

, so in some ways that was my first response. How could I contribute to the larger U. S. Catholic repertoire by introducing Asian American liturgical music?

Julia: Do you think that the role of a liturgist is about helping people to be at home in their tradition? , because they're singing in their own language,

I

Fr Ricky: absolutely do, in some ways many of the songs we sing or the prayers we use or the art or the gestures, it has to speak to a particular cultural group or location. or a local church in order for them to fully engage or fully participate consciously. All of those principles that came out of Vatican II.

That's where the cultural question became very critical, particularly, , academically during the 80s and 90s when I began to study that. So yeah, unless they do that, , , then in my estimation, , then the gospel message goes in one ear and out the other.

Right? So it has to be proclaimed, but then, , heard, acclimated, and integrated, , through their own cultural , sensibilities.

Julia: Yeah. It makes a lot of sense. Part of who we are as a people is informed by our culture, and God is in all of our cultures. So being awakened, to the holiness and the ordinary.

Yeah.

Fr Ricky: That's right. And, you know, at the same time, not every culture

compatible with the gospel message. So there's always going to be a [00:08:00] dialogue there. So for example, we can go beyond, , race or ethnicity and just talk about generational cultures, but there might be particular habits of a generational culture that uses, , everyday practices of social media that might not be compatible, we realize, you know, wow, this isn't really great. It's creating a generation of anxiety. So there's always going to be a dialogue, between our gospel message. And the various expressions that emerge from any particular culture.

And that's what I like. when you look at, those dynamics that happen in between, . Like, how do we balance this? While remaining, or having integrity of what our Catholic faith is all about.

Julia: Say more about the in between. Are you speaking about like a liminal space or transformation? Or is it like the exchange that happens?

Fr Ricky: Yeah. So part of my dissertation, at Berkeley focused on, , what are the everyday practices that Catholics do beyond the Sunday mass.

So in some ways I was looking at The in between, , practices that happen between Sunday and Sunday, . And I, studied maybe about, I don't know, maybe about 10 to 12, participants of a parish in San Francisco, St. Agnes Church. And I learned a lot. Like, how do they understand the Eucharist outside of the one hour official gathering?

Within the church walls of St. Natha's Church in the Haight Ashbury District in San Francisco.

Speaker 3: So in some

Fr Ricky: ways, they always are negotiating, right, their own worship sensibilities. It may be, listening to music while crossing the Bay Bridge to doing yoga.

Even though that may not be officially sanctioned, let's say, by the Vatican, but nonetheless, they still, do that and they learn how to integrate that into the Catholic identity.

It may

be [00:10:00] helping out at a soup kitchen, , and that becomes their way of worship. For one young adult couple, they did that more than coming to Sunday Mass.

So there was always this, , negotiating the various worship sensibilities and practices,, within this larger, what I would call the liturgy of life. Like all of these worship practices, in the end are called to worship and glorify God.

Julia: Hmm. Have you been noticing learning maybe even beyond that, dissertation study, but in other scholarship that this is part of the messiness of faith for folks?

Fr Ricky: Yes, it is. It is because, sometimes, , part of that messiness is simply encountering or experiencing other forms of worship.

That they had not been, trained in or, even given permission.

Speaker 3: To do

Fr Ricky: But it's also in that messiness were genuine encounters of the Holy Spirit speak to them that they may not have perhaps known about until they were in those in between, spaces of encountering.

Julia: So it could become messy in some ways, because of the strangeness . But if it's generally the Holy Spirit, you know, that is there guiding them, then maybe, perhaps in their discernment, what was once perceived as messiness becomes a genuine encounter with another form of worship that still remains faithful to their own um, accountability to what it means to be Catholic, as well as offer new paradigms that they would never had known about before.

So, Ricky, what is worship for you? , how do you define worship?

Fr Ricky: Yeah, I kind of define that as any kind of response that we might have to something or someone holy. It might be, , hearing, or understanding, or receiving any kind of communication from God, usually through the Holy [00:12:00] Spirit, my response to that, That's what I would call worship when it becomes a little bit more intentional.

It doesn't have to be ritualized, like, liturgical worship, where we gather, hour every Sunday, but worship could take place anywhere. It could take place when

I'm going for a walk in Manhattan or I'm in the subway and I notice someone who's in need of help.

Julia: My response to that might be a physical helping, it might be a prayer, , and in that sense I'm connecting it intentionally, , to an awareness of God, of the Holy Spirit, , through my Christian faith, my belief, . It's very Trinitarian in that sense. That's worship.

So I'd like to go back, , to a part of your story , we skipped over.

Speaker 3: Yeah, sure.

Julia: And as you describe worship as a response to the Holy Spirit, , or the movements of the Trinity more broadly, it's causing me to be curious. about how you discerned your call to be a priest and a Paulist priest.

Fr Ricky: Wow. Is

Julia: discernment, is discernment an act of worship?

Fr Ricky: It is. I think so. St. Paul talks about that, offering our bodies, , to the worship of God.

So,

I took a slow process intentionally. When I first got what I would call my vocational calling to think about the priesthood, I was maybe, what, 19? years old, , I got in touch with the, uh, vocation director in the Trenton Diocese, Trenton, New Jersey. I grew up in Marlborough, and I kind of took it in steps.

I said, this is kind of new to me, but let me go to some of the come and see weekends that vocation directors do. And at the end of that year, I was set to enter. Becoming a diocesan priest for the Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey. But then, I got in touch with the conventual Franciscans here in New York [00:14:00] City, because I was commuting to the Manhattan School of Music at the time, and going into the Port Authority, I would see this big sign for Covenant House.

Bruce Ritter and the things that he was doing for runaway teenagers. I got in contact with that vocation director. And when I went to their, retreats, I realized, Oh, well, here's a different setting of discernment in a religious community. It felt more intimate.

It felt like there was a particular charism the Franciscan. a spirituality. So that led me to say, let me continue my discernment, but in a religious community context, rather than St. Mary's in Baltimore, as much as it's a wonderful, seminary, I just felt , , a religious life setting would help my discernment.

But I never was ready to say, I'm ready to take my vows, or I'm ready to become a priest. I just saw it as a vehicle to continue that discernment rather than stay home and twiddle my thumbs . So what that led to is eventually, , after wonderful years with the Conventual Franciscans, and I really do love them to death, I still feel like I, I have their spirit within me.

I didn't feel like their ministerial options. Really suited my own, , ministerial gifts. , and I don't think they were ready or prepared to, you know, what do we do with this artist who wants to also get a doctorate, who also wants to do that? I mean, I want to do 12 things all the time.

Julia: I understand.

Me too.

Fr Ricky: So I don't blame them. And I got to know the Paulists while I was studying the conventuals for the first couple of years at Washington Theological Union. And I saw the Paulists as being much more dynamic as far as, uh, utilizing my gifts, , my perceived gifts at least at the time.

, and so I transitioned from the conventuals to the Paulists. , so I never, saw my vocation story as this what would you call it, uh, [00:16:00] enunciation, you know, romantic picture.

I always took it step by step, but throughout those years of going from a teenager to actually becoming ordained finally in 2000, from 1987 to 2000. I was developing my ministry in music, my passion for culture, all those things were coming into play. So it wasn't just a, vocation discernment as it was all integrated with my music, my spirituality, my understanding of who I am, , a religious Catholic priest.

Julia: I appreciate hearing that, especially since, , I'm working in vocation ministry still I'm always trying to remind discerners that the way you know what God is inviting you into is remembering that God communicates particularly with who you are.

And so you're a thinker, so your process and the way God guided you through the process is , by you thinking so much. Other people, it might have been a very emotional experience or a very intuitive experience, Yeah, God uses our nature.

Fr Ricky: Yeah, and I think it's about, just doing it, going into that process.

So, you know, getting my feet, and hands wet rather than do it by myself. Whether you have to go to a seminary or a convent or any kind of, but the idea that I wanted to intentionally be in a location, in a context,

Where I would be able to continue that dissemination, is something I always advocate, you know, when thinking about, the religious life with a priesthood.

Julia: . Well, let's, unpack that statement that you made earlier about ai. Oh, yeah. And, and the need for the church to do some, studying reflection, , because there's a lot of concerns about how AI could be impacting us as a church and as ministers, maybe we start with.

For those that are like you and I who are active ministers , our life is kind of defined [00:18:00] by our religious identity , and how we show up and serve and witness all the time. What do we need to be thinking about?

, and then I'll follow that with. providing you a little space to share with the ordinary Christian , or spiritual seeker, who's still just really figuring faith out and what God is asking them to do with their lives , what do they need to be thinking about when it comes to technology and AI in particular?

Fr Ricky: Yeah. So we've always been looking at, how does faith intersect, with media or science?

All of those questions. , and the Catholic Church actually, even at the official level, has been doing a pretty good job of bringing people together, and coming out with statements that , don't discourage the use of technology. Actually, the Catholic Church as a whole is one of the biggest, if not largest, institutional, , social institution that uses technology in media, right?

, Being in this podcast is a testament to that, , in December, 2022, Chachi BT came out with a , a 3. 0, a 3. 5, I even forget now, and that kind of, , accelerated people's approach to artificial intelligence, all of a sudden millions of people are

using this app. It's what we call generative ai, right? So now I could go to , , chat, GBT and I could, , ask it to generate, a poem based on a podcast that I'm doing today with Sister Julia and within 10 seconds, a poem comes out.

And I could say, bring in a quote, , from Maya Angelou and redo the poem. And it does it in three seconds. And then I could say, well, translate this now in Vietnamese. And it'll translate that in Vietnamese. And then I could say, , make an image of this.

And I could do this all within two or three minutes. So, what does that technology, , suggest or imply [00:20:00] when it comes to ministry? I could do that quickly with, coming up with a homily. Or a catechetical lesson for multi ethnic diverse community in Southern California within seconds, or any kind of prayer .

It has implications, right? I mean, it has wonderful opportunities of efficiency, but at the same time, we might question, because it's efficient, what might that do to our spiritual formation?

Julia: Right.

Fr Ricky: For example, , I could conceivably, , come up with a, homily for Christmas

I might tweak it a few times, not just once or twice, but, um, whatever it might take five to 10 minutes. , whereas in the past, If I were to prepare , , a homily for Christmas Eve, , for the Midnight Mass, I might have begun that

Julia: yeah, you give yourself several weeks.

Fr Ricky: That's right. And during that time, I might be wrestling with the angel of scripture. Like, Oh, what does this mean today? I mean, for me, when I preach, I guess don't repeat what I did last year, but it might be what's going on in a country, , recent election or , the wars that are going on.

But now I could just feed that into my. Chat GBT and come up with a very good first draft , after which I might edit. So those are some of the concerns, right?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: The efficiency might, in fact, change our understanding of spiritual formation as a preacher. In my case at the other end, ah, because I did this.

Maybe I could go in between, like I could come up with the first draft, but then maybe spend time wrestling with it, changing editing. Maybe because I could do that, it might free me, to do other things, you know?

Speaker 3: Yeah,

Fr Ricky: and that's where the devil, if you don't mind me using that term, comes in.

Because we've been wrestling with this for such a long time, right? Remember when we first got our smartphone?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: Oh, wow, this is wonderful. I remember the first time I had an email somewhere [00:22:00] in the middle of the 1990s. Oh, this is great, but I'm not going to give my email address.

To many people. I'm just going to give it to 10 people because I don't want to be embarrassed with all of this Technology I get a new Telephone number or a new iPhone model I'm just give my you know My telephone number to just these 30 people and we soon realize that we feel that all of a sudden we become busy once again

Speaker 3: And even though we've

Fr Ricky: had free time, even with new technology, it's supposed to make things more efficient, for some peculiar reason, we wind up filling up that time again.

Julia: We work harder and we work in more places and we work more and we have less leisure. I mean, I could say that for myself. Once I got a smartphone, it was a situation of like, Oh, cool. I can respond to emails at the bus stop now.

Fr Ricky: Right, right. Versus,

Julia: oh, I have to get to my desk and be in front of that clunky machine.

And, you know, just, yeah. And

Fr Ricky: this is where the messiness comes in, right?

Julia: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: I always believed that the number one sin, well, not the number one sin, but one.

Julia: A major sin.

Fr Ricky: of our, uh, of today's modern backlash postmodern life is, a lack of time, right? So we fill it in again when we don't like, I mean, ideally, if I were to, if AI could be a tool to help me write my homilies quicker, more efficiently.

While I still am able to sit with it and pray about it, then I ought to be using that extra time, what, maybe catching up with my exercise, writing those letters by hand to those good, you know, handful of friends, you know, but eating

Julia: someone a sandwich on the street, right? There's a lot of things. Yeah. So

Fr Ricky: here's the thing with AI.

Hmm.

Two years. That's becoming so much more [00:24:00] accelerated, even more so. And that's going to be incrementally getting faster and faster

do you see how this plays in then with the larger question of faith and technology and media, right?

The urgency that it may have as to how it might affect our faith lives, and there's a younger generation of Christians who were brought up with this. Even though adults are guilty as well, but we still have to go through their trauma of being, , brought up in a culture , , where social media became, the primary form of communication without a lot of safeguards.

Right from both Congress and even the church but as a whole, , we still have to look at that level of how we are going to, in some ways, pull them out of being addicted.

Julia: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Fr Ricky: You know, to social media

Julia: I'm a creative writer , and one of the ways I feel most connected to God is when I'm doing Some creative writing when I'm when I'm okay, I'm gonna write a poem now. Let's see what the spirit pours forth We'll see what happens Or an essay and in that creative process I feel like there's like this communion with the Holy Spirit that happens.

That's just so beautiful and it's really Takes a lot of vulnerability integrity and thought for me to show up on the page and in these ways. , I feel pretty curmudgeon y to think that , , people could be, like a robot, just like, hey, write me a poem and then boom, they have a poem and the robot wrote the poem, but they then , as a human put their name on it and say, oh, I wrote this beautiful poem , and that feels like some moral questions to me.

Fr Ricky: Sure. And that, of course, is one of the major debates and concerns going on now. We see that with Hollywood, right? They're [00:26:00] up in arms, rightfully so. Will AI replace scriptwriters,? And even some Catholic publishing companies, do not accept AI generated text.

So ethics is beginning to catch up and legalities because generative tools like chatGBT, they primarily borrow, a vault of trillions of data, you know, that's basically right now in the internet, but it won't necessarily tell you exactly where Or how they are, , fusing all of these ideas together into the text.

So they're stealing? Well, this is a question. , are they stealing? , are they not? , that's what it comes down to, right?

Julia: Well, I'm thinking, can robots break the commandments?

Fr Ricky: Well, again, robots, the robots are still generated by human Yeah. So it's still connected to us, . Uh

Speaker 3: huh.

Fr Ricky: You know, we're not at the time, of getting to, um, Terminator kind of robots or consciousness per se, although that's another area.

We'll look at that. But, so my point is. At this level, what we call, simple AI or generative AI, it's still generated by the promptings of a human being who has

to type in these command now. But the analogy I wanted to bring to you, because you were asking, is the stealing. Before ChatGPT, when I compose a melody , even a text, if I would really go deep into my mind, I could probably name three to four composers.

Or past songs that may have influenced that particular melody or text, and ultimately it's up to the editors of music publishing companies or editors of, books to determine what is, being stolen, uh, what word am I looking for or

Julia: plagiarized.

Fr Ricky: Yeah. Plagiarized ,

so there have been times when I could look through my music and I could say, Oh yeah, I could see how that particular melody came from so and so, so [00:28:00] in some ways, , my musical compositions , has been influenced, by everyone from Stephen Sondheim, to some of my liturgical composer.

, uh, heroes in the past, mentors , . So one question would be when I do that with chat GPT, , and it's doing it within 30 seconds. How do you discern, where the text is coming from?

What resources it's referencing, so, uh, it's very gray, isn't it? It's like sort of in the middle. But then you cut into the question of job displacement because while it might do that as an editorial tool or come up with fresh ideas, is it displacing jobs or, you know, music ministers or even composers now?

Julia: Huh. Like I was saying before, I just know creativity to be holy ground.

Fr Ricky: Yes. Yes.

Julia: And. Human creativity , is a sacred space where we get to really be in conversation with the spirit and co create something beautiful.

Maybe this is why I get curmudgeon y about it all. You know? It's like, , I want to foster the creative spirit in the human. Just as I want to foster the reflective spirit. I want to foster the critical thinker, so as I'm thinking through this, Ricky, as I listen to you, I'm aware that for me, underneath it all is this deeper question of What does it mean to be human?

Fr Ricky: Oh, boy. And

Julia: how are we as ministers meant to help people become more fully alive? What is the role of the ordinary Christian in helping others live the abundant life?

Fr Ricky: Yeah, yeah. Those are great questions, and , those are some of the present questions we're looking at now at the philosophical level.

Back in October, 24 and 25, , the Vatican actually gathered 70 AI experts to come together. Oh,

Julia: were you there?

Fr Ricky: I actually [00:30:00] was. , yeah, I, they actually asked me to be part of a panel.

Speaker 3: Cool.

Fr Ricky: I think that the topic was, um, what's the prophetic role of the Catholic church during this time of AI?

And, you know, part of our discussions about those two days, we looked at, \ , what does it mean to be human?

Speaker 3: You know,

Fr Ricky: by the way, , it was really, , such an engaging event. I mean, some of the people here, we had representatives from Microsoft to MIT. to TikTok, to Catholic University, to Notre Dame.

But here was a typical, , conversational thread. There was a, , one theologian there gave a talk about, what does it mean to be human. And, uh, well, AI.

get to a point where robots , have consciousness, . So, he's a great theologian, but he was using basically, uh, , metaphysical,

Speaker 3: epistemological

Fr Ricky: frameworks, which has its place.

But I also want to expand on it, so I asked. Could a machine, Come to consciousness, , without us recognizing it because we are looking at this

question of human consciousness from our traditional Roman Catholic framework.

Might it achieve consciousness beyond our worldview of Catholicism or the tools that we use? Then an MIT professor. He's kind of said, well, as long as we're inputting the data, we should be able to know and recognize when that moment happens.

And then one person say, well, you know, I'm not a theologian or philosopher or I don't write programs at MIT. I'm a mathematician and based on what you just said, given the computational incremental process, he calculates all that.

I think it's Cornell Luther King who brought us together to, , this is what the Vatican and Pope Francis. So that's a complexity that surrounds even this one question of what does it mean to be human? Right. Um, But AI is compelling us to bring people together. And to this extent, I really applaud the Vatican.

I think they're really ahead, [00:32:00] actually, as an institution and a hierarchy, than a lot of uh, religious groups, although I'm not really that are cognizant of other religious groups who are doing it. But those are the questions that are emerging. There aren't really straight answers per se, but that's the exciting time and perhaps the messy time we're living in now when we need to look at those questions.

Julia: It's, , Scholarly of you , to, uh, describe the landscape of complexity for me. I was hoping to really say, Oh, Julia, human beings love.

Fr Ricky: You can tell I'm a thinker of the Amarius Briggs. No, it's

Julia: great. It's great. I know. I mean, in the, maybe that's what I'm curious about is like, , have you landed somewhere in all of this exploration?

Do you have an opinion? Are you discovering a passion of like, woo, I just really want the ordinary Christian to know and think about this .

Fr Ricky: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think, if I were to, you know, give some kind of a thought, I don't know if I want to even call it advice, is that we need to be both open to ai, uh, and even it's possibilities that we may lead, but at the same time, cautious

Speaker 3: per se,

Fr Ricky: I would not worry about.

Terminator scenarios or , end of the world. . My deeper concern are two. The first is that it's not so much Terminator movies or Matrix movies and Skynets, but other human beings.

on this planet who will use AI for ill use.

Julia: Uh, yeah.

Fr Ricky: And that's why, we have to also, uh, begin to learn about it. Because also, and I want to say the bad guys or the bad people, they'll also be using it.

The second fear I have is this, when I was brought up, we were made to believe that what made me who I am was both nature and [00:34:00] nurture. Nature by maybe the genetic codes, you know, the biological. To nurture, which is more like the cultural, sensibilities.

That I grew up with, in New Jersey, . Now I think it's becoming more nature, because we're still biological people. And algorithms.

Julia: Wow.

Fr Ricky: Algorithms are kind of like the new nurturers.

Julia: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: Algorithms, you know, whether it's Netflix, YouTube, that know what, what I like to watch here, that's forming us more than we realize.

Julia: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: I have a fear of human beings. becoming even more programmable. And AI is going to resist in that. There's this opportunity, and this is where our Catholic faith comes in, and this is part of the advice.

so our Catholic faith, or Christian faith, any kind of religious tradition may have, , I believe, , or doorway , to complement that , or to be countercultural with those aspects that we need to be concerned about. in my case, being there at the Vatican, it was clear that our Catholic ethic tradition , it's a strong

tradition when we talk about common ground, when we talked about the dignity of the human person.

So you talked about AI. Well, that's so we can bring in our tradition of the dignity of the human person or economic disparity. For example, the United States, we are definitely the leaders of AI, but what about places like in Africa as we move forward?

will these global powers and corporations,

Speaker 3: it's going to

Fr Ricky: be even more of this economic disparity between rich, poor, right? What's going to happen then? So, that's coming from our Catholic tradition. It's not just us. Like, the UN also came up with wonderful ethical guidelines.

Speaker 3: We need to

Fr Ricky: begin to , bring in the wisdom of both international, civic, and religious, and philosophical, , organizations and [00:36:00] institutions to talk about, , the ethical concerns and existential fears that we may have.

Julia: Mmm. Thank you I feel challenged but , you know along as long as i'm doing with the community I feel capable So there's that yeah. Yeah. Oh, man. , our time is really winding down already There's a lot more that we could explore I want to make sure you have a little bit of time To share what you're discovering about what's needed from us today as , we are called to do deep polarization work in, in the church , and build up unity.

Fr Ricky: I'm so glad you brought this up because it is, uh, it's also one of my present passions. So my community, the Paulist Fathers, we started an initiative that's going to look at ultimately how do we depolarize, within our Catholic church and, how that might extend , to responding to the larger polarization that's going on in our country.

First let me just say this, that I do believe, , this severe or toxic polarization is really a first order crisis. And why do I, why am I there? I frame first order because we can talk about abortion, we can talk about ecology.

immigration, , same sex marriage. We can't talk about any of that until we know how to talk with one another. We can't resolve any of that until we come to, ,

some kind of a common ground where we can ultimately listen to one another. But after 60 plus years, , We just don't know how to listen, right?

So we demonize, or we're in tribal camps and it's become so toxic, that we feel like,, there's no possible way. Any of this can be resolved. So, , that came out of our, uh, Paulist foundations. We, you know, we always do this pre assembly where we ask our parishioners and our Paulist leaders what's going on, , in the [00:38:00] church and in the United States, because Paulists, we always like to respond to the signs of the times.

And polarization was one of the top two or three. Concerns. So two years ago, I formed, , with the help of my community, this policy initiative that's going to address this. What we did back in, , April, , 19 to 21 of this year in Las Vegas, we gathered a hundred leaders together, representing everyone from the both NCR editors were there.

And NC. Register the editors to talk about how media contributes to polarization,

Speaker 3: you know,

Fr Ricky: we had, all of these people from red, blue, left, right, right. We all have the common ground concern that we need to do something about polarization in order for us to,

come to hopefully a spirit, uh, understanding what truth is, right? Interpretation of truth in all of these issues. And let's just, let's just one gathering for two days. But the idea is that we really need to sustain this. Because it's going to take a while, , to depolarize, particularly with the toxicity, that we're living in.

And I would like to say with the last election, whoever was elected, if it was Harris or Trump, it would have been where the state we are now. It would have

Speaker 3: been

Fr Ricky: becoming even deeper, actually, and reactionary. And so I really feel like this is a first order crisis. To which we need to respond.

Julia: So, so, we're called to do it, but how, Ricky?

Fr Ricky: Let me say, generally, two ways, and this is broadly speaking, because it'll take a while. We create partnerships.

Julia: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: Okay, like what we were doing in Las Vegas.

Julia: Okay.

Fr Ricky: We bring people from both, actually, most U. S., 86 percent of them or so are fed up whether you're Republican or Democratic. You're fed up with the polarization.

Julia: Yeah. Which is a

Fr Ricky: good sign, [00:40:00] because that's culturally common ground. What partly fuels that is media that might give us the idea that we ourselves are polarized when it might actually be particular political or religious elites, or media, media elites as well, who may be perpetuating something that may not actually be there.

Julia: So are you suggesting that what we need to do is, is really pay attention to our storytelling?

Fr Ricky: That's usually the best way. I'm sorry to cut you off, but yes, I choose you the best way, the best entry, just sharing stories without judgment.

Julia: Uh huh. Learning

Fr Ricky: how to listen to one another.

Julia: And notice what stories we tend to repeat or were likely to be drawn to or.

Fr Ricky: That's right.

Julia: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: Because there's a lot more, I think that's what I'm trying to suggest, that there's a lot more common ground that we may realize.

Julia: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: So that's part of it. How to make it less polarized is creating partnerships. And then the other thing is we need to sustain this. It's going to take a while.

We're not You know, even though this policy initiative was formed two years ago, it's going to take years. But I think, , if we're adamant and, focused on this as a ministry and begin to spread the news, yeah, the Paulists are doing this, other, groups are doing this, various academic institutions, Boston College.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Fr Ricky: They've been looking at this. What I'm trying to do at least, let me get in touch with those leaders, you know. Uh huh. In the USCCB, we had two representatives from the US Bishops join us in Vegas.

So how can we, as leaders, influence and move forward so that this does not get worse

Julia: and, uh,

Fr Ricky: yeah, yeah. And of course I should say, this goes without saying, just relying on the Holy Spirit, this is not up to us. It might seem like an impasse.

Dear God, when you look at what's going on, if we don't need the Holy Spirit now to guide us, you know, with everything going on, , then who can?

[00:42:00]

Julia: Right, right. This is in God's hands, ultimately, and we are meant to do our part. . So , what else would you like to say about the messiness of being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

What all your study, your leadership, your ministries have helped you to understand about the realities of that experience?

Fr Ricky: Oh, wow. Great question. I would say, , Acknowledge the mess in us. There might be reactions to that, whether it's despair, confusion, or anger per se. But then, , with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it could also be opportunities

Speaker 3: for

Fr Ricky: how God may be speaking to you, and how God Through our, Christian tradition, may inspire you to respond to that,

If you are called to respond to that, but I'm not saying we welcome the messiness. But I always believe that, in hindsight at least, it's usually during those messy moments in life that God truly, , speaks to us because it confronts us and pushes us. To respond, \

Julia: amen. Thank you.

Okay. And Ricky, lastly, what would you like to share with our listeners about how they can, , support you in your ministries?

Fr Ricky: Oh, well, thanks for that. Um, you know, be attentive to some of the, administrative projects that my Paulist community is doing, particularly polarization.

If you Google some of the work like Paulist polarization and even my name, you might see some news articles of what we're doing, what we plan to do, we are going to be.

Revamping that, we're going to be having other resources placed there, perhaps even a podcast, we don't know. Resources for parishes, for church leaders. Just pray for us, you know. Pray for myself, my ministry, and my community during this time of , great difficulties and challenges with what's going on in the world and in our country.

Julia: Amen. , we can do it though. We stay together. We build up the [00:44:00] unity , and stay faithful to the Holy Spirit. That's what I'm feeling commissioned to do by you today. Thank you, Ricky.

Fr Ricky: Thank you, Julia. It was such a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Julia: Thanks for coming on Messy Jesus Business.

Peace.

Fr Ricky: Peace to you. God bless.