

[Spirituality](#)

[Pencil Preaching](#)



by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

[patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.](mailto:patrickjmarrin@gmail.com)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

May 5, 2020

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)



“Completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off.”
(Acts 13:3).

Acts 12:23--13:5a; John 12:44-50

The Christian world is now witnessing the remarkable collective spirit of the Muslim community as over a billion of its adherents commit to the Ramadan fast. Even in the midst of the pandemic, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset while slowing their lives down to reflect, pray and consider the needs of the poor. The annual practice is an exercise in solidarity and a deepening of religious identity. It is also a powerful witness to faith.

No movement has ever spread without this kind of collective spirit. In today’s reading from Acts, we see the faith community in Antioch engaging in similar activities as it grows and extends the message of the Gospel. After a period of fasting and worship in which the community discerns the will of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas are set apart for ministry, commissioned by the laying on of hands, then sent. Their discipleship is strengthened by discipline, openness to God and the unity of the Spirit.

In today’s Gospel reading from John, Jesus speaks of a key pattern reflected in the community. As the Father speaks to him, he speaks to the disciples. As the Father has sent him, he sends them. Therefore, anyone who encounters the disciples is actually encountering Jesus, and anyone encountering Jesus is actually encountering God the Father, whose love is the source of everything.

The church grows as the Source radiates outward in concentric circles, from The Father, through Jesus to the disciples, and through them to those who hear the Word and experience the radiant effects of God's love.

Pope Francis has described this same dynamic of radiant love as the essence of evangelization. Once set in motion, it has to be shared, moving out from the center to the margins. Without evangelization, the church stops growing, why a self-referential church that focuses on protecting its institutions gets sick.

Paradoxically, one way we have come to appreciate this outward dynamic is by being deprived of it because of the pandemic. Without gathering in our churches to celebrate the Eucharist and to renew our community connections, we are learning the importance of these resources and relationships to our own well-being and sense of personal identity. As creative as many have been through social media and virtual closeness, there is not substitute for actual community.

As we pray for restored health, now is the time to resolve to deepen our solidarity and collective purpose with one another as how we meet Jesus, know God and experience the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of Life.

Advertisement