Acts 1:12-14
After the Lord departed from them and was carried up into heaven, the Eleven returned to Jerusalem and did just as they had been commanded. They gathered together in an upper room in the city along with the believing women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, His relatives, and other believers. There were about 120 people in all. They waited for Power and Light like people who wait for the dawn or like those who go to a theater to see a play and wait for the curtain to rise so they can see things that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (cf. I Cor. 2:9). Acts 1 shows us the disciples and the rest of those with them as they are waiting.

What a solemn situation these men are facing at this crisis in their history! They are about to undergo a spiritual transformation and pass, so to speak, from the chrysalis to the butterfly. They are about to experience the great illumination which was promised by Jesus before His death. The Spirit of Truth is about to come and lead them into all Christian truth. The morning star is about to arise in their hearts (II Pt. 1:19). It is coming on the heels of the dreary, black night of mental confusion and despairing sorrow through which they have recently passed. They are about to be endowed with the ability to speak and with a changed character. These gifts will be given in proportion to their greater comprehension of the words and work of Christ. Then, when others hear them, they will be amazed and say to one another, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?....We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:7,11). They only have a vague notion of what is coming. Their hearts throb with an excitement that is full of expectancy and pounds with thoughts about the great things that are about to be revealed. Yet they faithfully sit in that upper room for ten long days and wait for the Father’s promise. Truly, it is an impressive, sobering picture. How do they wait? Do they sit still in silence, in Quaker fashion, expecting the descent of the Power? No. The meeting in the upper room was not a Quaker meeting. They prayed. They even conducted business. Peter, for instance, stood up and proposed that a new Apostle be elected to replace Judas, who had gone to his own place (cf. Acts 1:25). Their meeting was certainly not dull. But some who have never gone through any great spiritual crisis, or who think waiting on God is a synonym for listless inactivity, may think it was. The 120 believers did not suffer from ennui (boredom). Their prayers and supplications alone filled up many blessed hours. For people who are in a similar situation that the disciples were in, prayer is not the dull “devotional” practice with which we are
too familiar in these degenerate days. Rather, it is a wrestling with God. Hours pass, the dawn comes, before anyone is even aware of it. “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). They prayed without giving up, without getting weary, with one heart and mind.

Besides praying, the waiting disciples probably spent part of their time reading the Scriptures. This is not explicitly stated, but we can assume that they did it as a matter of course. We can also infer it from the way in which Peter handled the Old Testament texts in his address to the people on the day of Pentecost. That sermon seems to clearly indicate that it had been prepared before it was delivered. In one sense, it was an extemporaneous message, flowing out of Peter’s mouth by the influence of the Holy Spirit. But in another sense, it was the fruit of careful study. Without a doubt, Peter and his brothers revisited all those passages which Jesus had explained on the evening of the day on which He rose from the dead. One of them was a Psalm of David. Peter quotes it in his first gospel sermon to support the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection. We can find evidence that detailed, careful attention was given to that Psalm as well as to other Messianic passages of Scripture because of the exactness with which the quotation is given. The four verses of the Psalm are quoted word for word in Peter’s discourse just as they are found in the original text. This is even more remarkable because, as a rule, the New Testament speakers and writers do not compulsively adhere to the *ipsissima verba* (verbatim, literally “the very words”) when they cite the Old Testament. They quote the texts somewhat freely.

The 120 would not only engage in spiritual exercises for those ten days but would also talk about religious matters. The reading of the Scriptures would naturally pave the way for comments and questions. Those who had been privileged to hear Jesus explain, on the night of His resurrection, the things which were written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms about Him would not fail to instruct their friends in the things which they now understood. Peter had been prompt in proposing the election of another man who had witnessed the resurrection. He would not be less prompt to tell those in the upper room what the risen Jesus had said about these Old Testament texts. So he would freely speak to them about the meaning Jesus had taught him to find in Psalm 16, in the same way that he did later on when he took the liberty to address the multitude in the streets of Jerusalem. When the Psalm had been read, he said, “Men and brothers, the Lord Jesus interpreted these words thus and so.” When Psalm 109 had been read, he stood up and said, “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas....For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO MAN DWELL IN IT; and HIS OFFICE LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE’” (Acts 1:16,20).

**Pentecost**

This, then, is the way these brothers and sisters spent their time during these ten days. They prayed, they read the Scriptures, and they discussed what they read and what they expected to
see. And they continued waiting with one mind and heart in one place until the day of Pentecost had arrived. Suddenly, there came a sound from heaven like a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues like fire. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (cf. Acts 2:1-4). Then the promise was fulfilled, and the Power came down from on high in a way that illustrated the words of the prophet: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him” (Is. 64:4, NIV).

The things which happened at Pentecost were answers to the prayers that had been offered up during those ten days. We may call this the incubation period of the Christian Church. The lesson of encouragement that needs to be learned from this time should not be lost. So, it may be important to remember that the prayers of those who had been assembled in the upper room were not essentially different from the prayers of Christians at any other period in the Church’s history. They had the same burdens. The Eleven and the others prayed for the promised Power, for additional light on the meaning of Scripture, and for the coming of the divine kingdom on earth. We believe that while they prayed for these things with passion, they did not pray for them with extraordinary intelligence. It could be said of them (perhaps more emphatically than of most) that they did not know how to pray as they ought. We believe they had very unclear ideas about the “power,” its nature, and the results it was supposed to produce. We know they had rough, and even mistaken notions of the “kingdom.” For it is recorded that on the very day when He ascended, they asked Jesus the question, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Three serious misconceptions are contained in this brief question. First, they assumed that Christ was going to reign personally on earth as a great king (like David). The disciples had no concept of an ascension into heaven. Second, the kingdom they expected was simply a national, Jewish one. They asked, “Is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Third, the kingdom they looked for was political, not spiritual; not a new creation, but a kingdom on earth that would be restored from a humble state to one of power and glory.

The level of understanding the Eleven had about the kingdom on the day He ascended into heaven remained about the same until the day of Pentecost. It is true that when He was responding to their question, Jesus made a statement that was appropriately designed to correct their misconceptions. Jesus formally declined to give information to satisfy the curiosity of His disciples. However, His reply provided a clear and full explanation of the situation as it really was. When He spoke about the power which they would receive, Jesus was openly hinting that the work of ushering in the kingdom was to be done by the Apostles as His representatives - not by Him personally. The same thing is implied in the words, “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8), because witnesses would only be necessary for someone who could not be seen. By connecting the “power” with the descent of the Holy Spirit, Jesus corrected the third mistake of the Eleven
about the kingdom - that it was to be political in nature. The power that arises out of the baptism of the Spirit is moral, not political. And a kingdom that is founded through this kind of power is not a kingdom of this world but one whose subjects and citizens believe the truth. When Jesus was speaking about His kingdom before Pilate, He said, “Every one who is of the truth hears My voice” (Jn. 18:37). Finally, the words, “witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8), were certainly designed to erase from the minds of the Eleven the dream that His kingdom would simply be a national Jewish kingdom. If it was only the kingdom of Israel that was going to be restored, then why bear witness to Jesus until the end of the world? The witness-bearing Jesus is talking about indicates a kingdom that is universal in nature and embraces people from every tongue and tribe under heaven.

**The True Nature of Christ’s Kingdom**

From the way Jesus answered them, the disciples could have understood the true nature of the kingdom, that it is one founded on faith in Christ; that a King presides over it, no longer present in the body but omnipresent spiritually; that it is not limited to one country but embraces everyone who is of the truth in every part of the world. However, they did not understand these truths from the words on which we have just been commenting. They were going to learn about the nature of the kingdom, not from Jesus’ teaching but from the events of providence. The big picture of the kingdom of God would remain hidden from their eyes until the curtain was lifted in three distinct historical moments: 1) the ascension, 2) the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost on the multitude who had come to keep the feast, and 3) the conversion of the Samaritans and the Gentiles. The first of these had already happened when the disciples assembled themselves together in the upper room to wait for the promise of the Father. Jesus had already ascended. So they now knew that the seat of the empire, the capital of the kingdom, was in heaven, not in Jerusalem. This knowledge was very valuable, but it was not all they needed. Only a small part of the picture was visible to the disciples at this time. They were still in the dark as to the nature and extent of the coming kingdom. They had expected to see a picture of a new Palestine, not of a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness would dwell. And, without a doubt, they continued to hold on to this expectation until the curtain was lifted, and they were shown what they had been praying for (they really hadn’t known). They learned that the Hearer of prayer not only does for His people what they ask, but far above what they even think.

This picture of the disciples waiting in the upper room, when viewed from the perspective of the events which are recorded in the book of Acts and from the whole history of the Church, suggests another observation. We can learn from these events that significance may be found in things which seem to be very insignificant. Earlier in the book, we had the opportunity to make this remark about the first meeting that Jesus had with five of those who later became members of the chosen Twelve. We think it is appropriate to repeat it here. That meeting in the upper room would have been contemptible to the contemporary Jewish world, if they had known of its existence. Yet it was the only thing of importance that was going on in Judea at the time. The
Waiting

hope for Israel - yes, even the world - lay in that small congregation. Even though it was small, God was with those who formed it. Unbelievers who do not believe in a supernatural influence smile at words like these. But even they must acknowledge that some source of power was in the midst of that community, for this little group multiplied so fast that they even surpassed the Israelites in Egypt. Those who reject divine influence impose on themselves the burden of expending the energy to explain the facts of this situation. For those who believe in that influence, it is enough to say the little flock grew greatly, not by might, nor by power of this world, but by God’s Spirit (cf. Zech. 4:6). It was their Father’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom.

A Final Word
And now, as we leave those men with whom we have fellowshiped for so long, it may be helpful to summarize the teaching they received from their Master. Of course, it is impossible in a summary to adequately report on the teaching they received for their future career. The reason is this: By far, the most important part of that training consisted in the simple fact that, for years, they had been with someone like Jesus. Yet it may be beneficial to let our readers see at a glance that even though the instruction Jesus gave to His disciples was unsystematic and occasional (differing totally from the teaching given in theological schools), the Divine Master, while He was with them, gave His pupils priceless lessons on many topics that were extremely important. Below are the topics in the order in which they have been considered in this work.

Jesus gave His disciples lessons on:
- the nature of the divine kingdom;
- prayer;
- religious liberty, or the nature of true holiness;
- His own Person and claims;
- the doctrine of the cross and the importance of His death;
- humility and similar virtues;
- the right Christian character required of disciples (both in their private lives and in their ecclesiastical lives);
- the doctrine of self-sacrifice;
- the leaven of Pharisaism and Sadduceeism and the problems it would bring on the Jewish nation; and
- the mission of the Comforter, to convince the world and to enlighten the disciples.

And His teaching, assuming we have even an approximately correct account of the teaching in the Gospels, was designed to make the disciples what they were required to be as the Apostles of a spiritual and universal religion.
- their minds had been enlightened;
- they were endowed with a love that was broad enough to embrace all of mankind;
- their consciences were extremely sensitive to their responsibilities;
• they were delivered from all superstitions;
• they were emancipated from the shackles of custom, tradition, and the commandments of men; and
• they had hearts that had been purged of pride, self-will, impatience, anger, vindictiveness, and an unwillingness to forgive.

They were slow to learn and, even when their Master left them, they were far from perfect. We have frankly admitted this. Still, they were men who were made of excellent moral stuff. So, it shouldn't surprise us that, since they were with Jesus so long, they would prove to be exceptionally good and noble men when they came before the world as leaders of a great movement and were called on to carry out their responsibilities. They certainly did not do this without the enlightening, sanctifying influence of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit). Yet even those who have no faith in the supernatural must admit, on purely psychological grounds, that men who had received such exceptional training were likely to vindicate themselves wisely, bravely, and heroically as public servants. According to the actual narrative in the Acts of the Apostles, they did, in fact, vindicate themselves. Notwithstanding liberal theological critics, they vindicated themselves in a manner that was totally worthy of their great Master.