

celebration meditation

by Richard J. Foster



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The Wait!

I HAVE JUST RETURNED from three days of prayer and study at a Franciscan retreat center on the Pacific Coast. The rewards of such an endeavor are stamped deep within the secret sanctuary. It is the hidden work of God, placing an undeniable brand upon the interior life. Some men would repudiate such a passion for the life of devotion because it smacks of nineteenth century pietism. They are abbreviated men who have failed to see that the life of faith determines the life of service. Christian people cannot afford to forget the deeply spiritual nature of their warfare, even when the demonic forces are incarnated in very concrete forms and institutions.

Prior to the commission to go, Jesus instructed his disciples to wait. We, too, must wait if we expect to go in power. Anyone can go, but few there are that go in power. In the opening verses of Acts we discover Jesus' impressing upon his disciples the absolute necessity of waiting in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit. So they waited — for ten days! — a response which is some kind of a miracle in itself, for none of the disciples was noted for their patience. The results were stupendous! Though our information is sketchy, it is not hard to imagine some of the issues with which they had to deal. Certainly they were forced to work through the hostilities that had poisoned the fellowship. Undoubtedly they learned the deeper ways of prayer. Clearly they had learned to wait. The resultant impact changed the course of history.

Many concerned Christians today lament lack of power in the contemporary church. One sure reason is that most Christians have never considered that they must experience anything remotely akin to *the wait at Jerusalem*. They run here and there in a desperate attempt to keep the ecclesiastical machinery oiled. They feel mildly uneasy about giving whole blocks of time to prayer and study. Somehow Christians feel that such efforts are taking them away from the real work of the Kingdom. Have they not learned that a shallow life gives birth to a shallow ministry? How completely they have been indoctrinated by this world's system! Surface roots produce dwarfed fruits.

Our Quaker Meetings will remain essentially ineffective until the gathered community sees the necessity of their Jerusalem wait. At our own Meeting we are learning how transforming this can be. Once the necessity of this experience has gripped us, people have been gathering spontaneously for prayer, study and worship. Most of the gatherings are in homes. Some discuss mutual needs and pray. Others are study oriented. Still others accent singing and rejoicing. In all, the fruits of love, joy and power are emerging. Often groups will go for five and six hours at a stretch. It is from such experiences that avenues of service and ministry emerge. We have only scraped the surface, but we have experienced enough to know that we are on the right track. A gold mine of spiritual power awaits those hardy enough for the discipline.

The form of such a wait will vary with the people — its importance is crucial. May God give *you* an adventurous wait!