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**SUNDAY, JULY 4, 2010**  
**THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**Luke 10:1-11, 16-20; Galatians 6:7-16 (The key to faithful citizenship)**

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**TODAY'S SERMON THEME:**

Nearly all U.S. civics, government and history textbooks devote considerable space in discussing the key requirement for being a faithful citizen. It is no secret. By far, our primary requirement is active participation in the democratic process. ACTIVE participation. In order for our nation to remain "the land of the free and the home the brave," we must all be ACTIVELY involved. In an even more profound way, the key requirement for being a faithful member of Christ's body, the Church, is also ACTIVE participation. Without active involvement, there is no security, no growth, no hope, no peace.

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**1. Most of us do not think of these things very often, but they are true: First, we live in two worlds. Second, we live under two flags. And, third, our allegiance is focused in two directions simultaneously.** It is so easy these days to get confused about questions of citizenship -- especially as the debate continues to rage about illegal immigration, border protection, and the expansion of taxpayer dollars to help "solve" this problem of our own making. But let's take just a minute, on this holiday weekend, to look at our TWO citizenships . . . and the expectations and duties that they place on our lives:

**(1) First, on this Fourth of July, we look thankfully backwards in time 234 years to the publication of our nation's Declaration of Independence on Saturday, July 4, 1776.** And we are reminded that we are citizens of the United States of America, living under the flag known affectionately as "Old Glory," the stars and stripes symbolizing our 50 states and 13 original colonies. **Most of us know the story of our flag's origin, how it was sewn by Betsy Ross to the specifications set by George Washington, using three colors (red, white, and blue).** Most of us know the unofficial meaning of the colors: Red for courage, white for purity, blue for loyalty or diligence. Most of us know the protocol for our flag, and the pledge of allegiance to the flag. We are, for the most part, very familiar with this -- even though the questions of "loyalty" and "pledges of allegiance" continue to be subjects of legal disputes and debates all across our land.

**(2) Second, as our scripture lessons today remind us, through the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live within the Kingdom of God -- a spiritual, infinite kingdom that is both here and now, but is also yet to come, at the time of God's choosing.** And since Sunday, September 26, 1897, there has been a flag for the Christian Church, too. The Christian flag is actually one of the oldest UNCHANGED flags in the world -- standing the same today as it did 113 years ago. **It was designed on the spur-of-the-moment by Charles C. Overton, superintendent of Sunday School at Brighton Chapel, Coney Island, New York.** Overton came up with the idea as he was filling in for a guest

speaker who never showed up to make a talk to the children of the parish. With all the kids getting nervous and fidgety, Overton went to the pulpit and started talking about the American flag which was draped over the pulpit. As he spoke, he suddenly asked rhetorically why we did not have a CHRISTIAN FLAG. And then, right on the spot, he came up with the design for a Christian flag, with the help of the children. It was such a great idea that he spent the next week making the flag; and he presented it to the church the following Sunday . . . and it has never changed since that day. It is also red, white, and blue -- white for purity, blue for faithfulness to the Lord, red for the blood shed by Christ. The flag is entirely white, except for a blue background in the upper left corner and a red CROSS in the middle of the blue background. This flag also has a pledge of allegiance: "I affirm my loyalty to the Christian flag and to our Savior whose cross it bears, one spiritual fellowship under that cross, uniting us in service and love."

**2. Two worlds. Two flags. Two loyalties. There is nothing contradictory to national loyalty in Holy Scripture -- as long as we "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).** In fact, the New Testament very specifically points out the importance of supporting our earthly authorities. In Matthew 22, Jesus tells His followers to "give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar" . . . but also to "give to God the things that are God's." St. Paul stresses the importance (in Romans 13) of being humble subjects of our earthly authorities. Paul also says in multiple places (1 Timothy 2, Titus 3) that we are to hold up our rulers and governing officials in our prayers. Even our Lord Jesus, in His final appearance before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, mentions the spiritual truth that Rome would have NO authority over Him unless it had been given them "from above." Pilate's authority to sentence our Lord to death was an authority given "from above." There is no contradiction -- from a New Testament standpoint -- of giving our allegiance to our national authorities. . . again, as long as we recognize that our first duty is to be humble servants of our God. But there is another element to this whole idea of "citizenship." And it is probably the most important element. And here it is: Our IDENTITY as citizens of TWO realms also brings responsibilities, duties, and expectations. We are not awarded the status of "faithful citizens" unless we are willing and able to fulfill the responsibilities, duties, and expectations that are part and parcel of our status as "citizens." In other words, to be called by the NAME of citizen, we must honor and fulfill the requirements of citizenship. And those "requirements of citizenship" are the things I want to focus on this morning as we look over our Scripture lessons.

**3. And the main point I was to emphasize on this Fourth of July Sunday, as we look at our lessons, is this:**

Nearly all U.S. civics, government and history textbooks devote considerable space in discussing the key requirement for being a faithful citizen. It is no secret. By far, our primary requirement is active participation in the democratic process. ACTIVE participation. In order for our nation to remain "the land of the free and the home the brave," we must all be ACTIVELY involved. In an even more

profound way, the key requirement for being a faithful member of Christ's body, the Church, is also ACTIVE participation. Without active involvement, there is no security, no growth, no hope, no and He peace.

**4. (A) In our first lesson -- Isaiah 66:10-14 -- we hear the wonderful summons by the prophet to REJOICE in the Lord.** All those who love the Lord are called upon to change their mourning, their sadness, into JOY. "As a mother comforts her child," the Lord says to Isaiah, "so will I comfort you." God says He will carry His faithful in His arms, providing nourishment and sustenance and blessings, just as a parent on earth would comfort a child. And because of God's blessings for His people, our response (our duty, our obligation) is to TAKE NOTE OF WHAT GOD IS DOING and REJOICE. "You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice," says the Lord. For it is in our rejoicing (our ACTIVE participation in our faith) that "it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with His servants." What an AMAZING promise to us. What an awesome gift to us.

**(B) In our second lesson -- from Psalm 66:1-8) -- we are again called upon to declare our faith (our allegiance to our Lord) by responding with JOY to our God.** "Be joyful in God, all ye lands; sing the glory of His Name; sing the glory of His praise." We are to look around at what the Lord has done -- his "mighty deeds of power" -- and REJOICE. God is the One who "holds our souls in life" and He "will not allow our feet to slip." Again, we show our allegiance -- our status as citizens of the Lord -- by giving Him our praise, thanks, and JOY.

**(C) In our third lesson -- from Galatians 6:1-16 -- we are warned by St. Paul that the Lord who has called us into His spiritual fellowship MUST ACTIVELY DO what the Lord calls us to do.** And our primary task is to SHARE THE GOOD NEWS with others. Our faith cannot be personal, only, but must be shared -- delivered, taken, demonstrated, with those around us. "If you sow to your own flesh," Paul writes, "you will reap corruption. But if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit." And then we hear this warning: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow." Corruption or righteousness. Chaos or peace. Life or death. "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right," Paul writes, "for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up."

**(D) Finally, in our Gospel lesson -- from Luke 10:1-11,16-20 -- the Lord Jesus gives us our marching orders: to go into the Lord's harvest field and serve Him and those He brings into our paths.** Notice how our text begins: Jesus appoints 70 others and sends them out two-by-two "to every town and place where He himself intended to go." We are sent as forerunners, messengers, of Jesus. We are preparing His way. We are setting the stage. We are preparing the scene . . . for miracles to take place. But we MUST be actively involved. We MUST fulfill the key requirement of our citizenship.

**5. On this national holiday, let us remember that we are here for a purpose -- God's purpose.** Let us remember our two flags, our two citizenships . . . and our duty to stay ACTIVELY involved in serving the Lord and those around us.