

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2026

It is a very good thing to be a good citizen, and the near coincidence of the Independence Day and our celebration of the Lord's Day affords the opportunity to say that being a good citizen of an earthly polity, such as the State of Wyoming and the United States of America, of both of which I am proudly a citizen, is included in the earthly task of a Christian. I was quite delighted that a young parishioner from my Lander days, Miriam Washut, who has several relatives who are active members of this parish, was the national winner of the inaugural Presidential 1776 Award Competition. Being the first place winner out of 8,000 bright high school students is impressive, impressive enough to warrant an Oval Office meeting with the President of the United States, whom she rather nonplussed by stating that she means to attend Wyoming Catholic College and might just become a smoke jumper, who knows? The competition involved knowledge of America's Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and America's War of Independence. Deep knowledge of those three things is surely the mark of an intelligent American Citizen. .

Having said that being a good citizen of the United States of America is fully compatible with being a good Christian, I move into Part Two of my two part sermon on the Communion of Saints. As St. Paul reminds us in his Epistle to the Philippians, 3:20, "Our citizenship is in Heaven, and from Heaven we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We do not deny our earthly citizenship, but we do ultimately transcend it. Our King does not demand that we renounce all earthly allegiances, for He is "meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass." (Zechariah 9:13). He demands only that our earthly allegiances be themselves put at His service, so that we serve Him by serving our country justly and honorably. I remember once helping a fiercely patriotic Army Sergeant and a zealously Catholic nurse prepare for marriage. At first, he was annoyed that she regarded her Faith in Jesus Christ as her highest loyalty, but gradually he came to realize that this did not mean diminishing loyalty to the United States. It meant purifying it, by linking it to the only King Whose Mercy is always wise (human mercy isn't always) and whose Justice is perfectly proportionate (human Justice never is).

There are foolish Americans who respond to the evident fact that there are some things wrong with America with the foul and rude gesture of burning the American flag. How stupid! A dangerous dunce rejects his country because it is highly imperfect (being a dunce, he never imagines that the same could be said of him). A member of the Communion of Saints would never burn the flag. He would wash it, so to speak, with holy water, invoking upon America the living Water that is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, a Spirit that perfects what is good and corrects what is bad. At a military Funeral, I once accidentally sprinkled some holy water on the flag covered coffin as I blessed the gravesite. Another fiercely patriotic Army Sergeant complained to me about this, a bit aggressively. Holding my temper, I said that he should think of holy water as honoring the flag, invoking upon the Republic for which it stands the only Power by Whose blessing nations thrive and endure.

That same Holy Spirit makes us citizens of Heaven, even now. St. Paul tells us, "You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Romans 8:9). To be in the flesh is to be focused on the affairs of this world. To be in the Spirit is to be focused on the things of Heaven. A member of the Communion of Saints values the Christian Faith not because it helps improve this earthly city, which it does, but because it brings

us into the Heavenly City, where “God will dwell with them and they will be His people, and God Himself will always be with them as their God.” (Revelation 21:3) The Church of Jesus Christ exists for one purpose, and one purpose only, to enable human beings, by the Grace and Spirit of Jesus of Christ, to become citizens of the Kingdom of God and heirs to Eternal Life.

Such questions as the following are not unimportant, but they deal with matters of the flesh and, while demanding some attention, they must not be allowed to swallow too much of a Christian’s time and energy: After eight decades of unending educational reform, do we need yet another dose of it? Is crime increasing, and, if so, what are we to do about it? Those, and many other similar questions, will not be discussed here, not because they are unimportant, but because the Church’s Sacraments, Scriptures, preaching, and teaching, are all for the purpose of saving human beings from the second death, bringing them into Eternal Life, and helping them become not merely respectable but actually holy. A side effect of being holy is being a good citizen of the earthly city, just, charitable, hard working, and law abiding; but that is only a side effect. The main effect of holiness is a degree of perfection of Mercy and Justice which the earthly city may actually find annoying. When that happens, the Church is forbidden to compromise, not even the well intentioned compromise of “who am I to judge?” Judge no - but warn, oh my, yes! And the warning always comes down to this: “If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 8:13)

The simple fact is that the mere good citizen, respectable enough according to the flesh, is more or less righteous in most ways most of the time, but does not hunger and thirst for righteousness. A true member of the Communion of Saints hungers and thirsts for righteousness, trusting in the Lord’s promise, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6). They will be satisfied with nothing less than what the Lord promises to the pure of heart. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) To see God is to participate in divine life for all eternity, than which nothing greater can be imagined. Such is the sublime destiny of the pure of heart, the truly holy, the citizens of Heaven, the members of the Communion of Saints.

Worldly learning has its uses and is not to be despised, but too often it traps us in the mud, or even quicksand, of the flesh. When it comes to the things of the Spirit, the Lord’s true word is “I give praise to You, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to little ones.” (Matthew 11:25).

May God grant to us the Grace to be among His little ones, ready and willing to be taught and exercised by Him, through the Sacred Scriptures and Holy Church’s Worship. Being teachable is one of the key qualities of the Communion of Saints. For those willing to be taught and exercised by God, there is a heavenly food that takes us into Eternal Life, namely the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who nourishes and cherishes us all the way through this life into a happy eternity.

Amen.