Joyce Robbins, Wayne Beck, Karen and Thomas Moore, Jennifer James, Michael Millsap, Jonathan Lane, Maureen Taylor, Peter Krause. Who are these people? They used to be citizens of the United States, but no more. Last year, along with hundreds of other people, they turned in their passports and headed North, South, East and West. We seem to be setting records for people who freely renounce their citizenship. Those names I read at the beginning are not the names of real expatriates, so if your name is Jennifer James or Michael Millsap, I apologize. But the names of real expatriates are a matter of public record. But why do they break up with their country and head for greener pastures? Why would anybody want to leave the land of the free and the home of the brave of their own free will? You might think it would take a gut wrenching argument to convince someone to give up their citizenship. But there’s usually not a lot of hugging, tears, crying and sobbing involved. Most of these expatriates gladly hit the road because of the tax dollar. Most of the time, they say goodbye to the red, white and blue to search for countries that have a more lenient tax code.

They pack their bags without much fame or fanfare. They don’t tug on their ear to say goodbye like Carol Burnett did at the end of her television program. They don’t give a famous retirement speech like Lou Gehrig did at Yankee Stadium. And, unlike General Douglas MacArthur, they normally don’t plan on returning.

The Ascension reminds us that this world is not our true home. If you don’t remember anything else of what I say today, maybe that is the most important. We are in the world but not of it. We do not belong to this planet; we are citizens of another world. St. Paul told the Philippians that their citizenship is in heaven. We’ve been given a new passport. So while we are foreigners in a strange land, how shall we make the best of our brief time here? How can we make this work? If you’ve ever travelled to a foreign country, you know that the local people can always spot a foreigner. They look different, dress different and think different. If you’re a foreigner you’ll stick out and stand out. Do we stick out and stand out as Christians? Or do we live like people whose citizenship is here-- in materialism, secularism, consumerism. Do we go along with the maddening crowd, or do we march to the beat of a different drummer. If our thoughts and values are those of worldly people, then we are not only in the world, we are of the world. Is our lifestyle one of keeping up with the Joneses, or keeping up with the Beatitudes? Is our philosophy eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die? Do we live by the pleasure principle or the values of the gospel? God has placed us here for a reason. We have a
mission -- to live for the glory of God and advance his kingdom, not our own. It's amazing how many people don't know their identity and purpose for being here.

I had a good priest friend who lived in Vermont. I would often go to visit him on vacation. He was called back home a few years ago. We almost always made a trip to Canada to visit St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal or sacred shrines in Québec. We always got a bit nervous when we came to the border. We weren't always sure whether or not we would be allowed to enter Canada. The border guards almost always ask you these three questions -- who are you, where are you from and where are you going? Those three questions tell Christians their identity and purpose. Who are we, where are we from and where are we going? Can we sincerely say that we are children of a king, that we came from God and are going back to God? Our Lord said that about himself 'I came from the Father and I am returning to the Father.' Where the head of the Church has gone, we hope to follow. And we will, as long as we don't cut ourselves off from the body in unforgiven serious sin. Like hundreds of US citizens do every three months, we have given up our passport to this world. We haven't moved to Russia, Germany or Timbuktu. We have opted for God's kingdom. We've broken our ties with this planet and fallen in love with a heavenly abode. Until the day when we are called home, we have to remember that we are merely pilgrims in this passing world.

God love you!