

**A MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP SHANE JANZEN  
ON THE 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
CONFEDERATION OF CANADA  
JULY 1, 2017**

ONE hundred and fifty years ago, on July 1, 1867, a small group of British North American colonies came together to form the Dominion of Canada. The Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada (which became Ontario and Quebec), together with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, expressed their desire “to be federally united into One Dominion under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with a Constitution similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom.” Upon this venture the Fathers of Confederation sought the blessings of Almighty God; putting their trust and confidence in divine providence by choosing as the motto of the new nation the words from Psalm 72 verse 8: “He shall have dominion from sea to sea”.

And here we are now in the year 2017, with Canada stretching from sea to sea to sea, encompassing ten Provinces and three Territories. We come together on this July long-weekend to celebrate 150 years of Canadian identity, history, victory and struggle. In these years we have come to recognize the place and importance of the Aboriginal Peoples, as well as the impact of generations of immigrants, in making Canada what it is today.

While welcoming peoples from different faiths and languages, cultures and traditions, Canada and Canadians have remained loyal to the ideals upon which our nation was founded. Millions who have come to this land from distance places around the globe, my own family included, have found opportunities to realize their dreams and aspirations amidst a thriving, vigorous and peaceable kingdom. And for those of us who share in the vision of Canada as a great nation, the place of God and the importance of religious faith is an integral part of who we are as a nation and a people. We are reminded of the admonition set out in the 127<sup>th</sup> Psalm: “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Much has changed over the past 150 years since Confederation, but much has remained constant. Statistically, Canada remains a predominately Christian nation. The 2011 national census revealed that of the 33 million people in Canada, 22 million self-identify themselves as Christian – some 67.3% of the overall population. Of that number, 1.6 million (or 5%) consider themselves Anglican. In the last 20 years, however, the Christian population in Canada has declined by 6.5%. Equally significant is the fact that 24% of Canadians (7.8 million) do not identify themselves with any religious belief – a number that continues to increase with every decade.

One can argue from this that Christian witness and evangelization needs to ramp up and reach out to our fellow Canadians. There is a very real role for the Church and for Christians in the life of Canada. In our Constitution, in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in our National Anthem, in our Royal Anthem, God is clearly acknowledged and invoked. Prayer still attends the opening of every Parliamentary day in Ottawa and across the Provincial and Territorial Legislatures. The holding of the Bible and the swearing of an oath before God still attend the appointment of the great officers of State. Generations of men and women fought and died to preserve this way of life – and the memorial of their sacrifice is to be found in churches across this land.

However, as Christians we are also in the very real danger of becoming marginalized. The 'comfortable pew' has increasingly become the 'comfortable country'. Our recognition and support of religious freedom and tolerance can lead to apathy in our Christian witness, and even a reluctance to speak out in the name of Christ when matters of faith and morals come to the fore in our national debate.

Too often 'freedom of religion' has come to mean 'freedom from religion'. The practice of one's religious faith is increasingly being pushed out of the public square and out of national life. Although the Preamble to our Constitution declares that Canada is "founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God", that statement is becoming increasingly hollow. As Christians we are told to leave our faith and morality at the doorstep of our homes and private lives, and not to bring our faith, beliefs and values into the public square or public office, into the market place, or educational institutions of our country. But we know that as Canadians and as Christians our identity, our outlook on life, our beliefs and values, are formed out of our faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings of His saving Gospel.

Each of us as citizens of Canada, but ever mindful of our solemn responsibility as subjects of Christ the King, need to do our part to ensure that freedom of religion is more than words on a legal document; that as Christians our voice and our vote are heard in the corridors of power, reflected in the laws enacted by our parliaments, respected in our courts of law, and spoken truthfully in our institutions of learning. Our faith in Christ is something we are called to live out not only in our homes and families but in our daily public lives as citizens.

Let us remember, as we commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Confederation, that we are a nation and people under God. That our rights and freedoms are only as strong as our faith in the One who gives us those rights and freedoms. That as citizens of Canada, but also citizens of the 'heavenly country' spoken of in Holy Scripture, we can only expect God to prosper our ways and to bless our land when we ourselves, and as a nation, make our ways His ways.

The blessings of freedom, peace and justice are not the products of politics, or public policy, or even order and good government; they are the fruits of righteousness wrought through obedience to the universal commandments of God – He who is the Sovereign Lord of all nations.

In the words of the fourth stanza of our National Anthem, let us always pray:

*Ruler supreme, who hearest humble prayer,  
Hold our dominion within thy loving care;  
Help us to find, O God, in thee  
A lasting, rich reward,  
As waiting for the Better Day,  
We ever stand on guard.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.*

+Shane B. Janzen  
Metropolitan of The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada  
and Primate of the Traditional Anglican Communion