

July 1, 2020

A Day Worth Celebrating

Each year Canadians from coast to coast to coast set aside July 1 to mark the anniversary of Confederation and to celebrate our country. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, this year's celebrations of Canada Day will look significantly different. There will be no large gatherings on Parliament Hill or elsewhere, no fireworks, no concerts, no parties, not even gatherings with friends for a BBQ. Some of us might be wondering what Canada Day is without a party. And some of us might not feel like there is much to celebrate given the current pandemic. But I believe that giving up on celebrating Canada Day this year would be a mistake.

Despite not being able to have our traditional Canada Day celebrations, there is still much to be thankful for. I believe that living in Canada, with all the benefits that involves, is a blessing and a gift. The Bible says that "every good and perfect gift comes from above" (James 1:17). Therefore, we should celebrate Canada Day if for no other reason than to give thanks to God for the tremendous blessing of living in this wonderful country. It is truly a blessing to be alive at this time in history and to be living where we are. Canada is a land of peace, freedom, and prosperity. We need only to look around us and to look at so many other parts of the world to realize how blessed we are.

Canada is a vast territory with beautiful surroundings and abundant natural resources. Whether it is forestry or fishing, mining or agriculture, we are blessed with resources which provide for our needs and are a source of employment and wealth. Our natural environment also provides us with the opportunity to enjoy nature, whether it is in one of our national or provincial parks, at a cottage, or right here in our own beautiful town on the Mississippi River.

Our country is also rich culturally. People from many different backgrounds - ranging from the Indigenous Peoples who first inhabited this land to the settlers who came from all corners of the earth - make up our diverse multi-cultural identity that is a source of national strength. And although there are tensions from time to time, we all manage to live together in relative peace and unity.

People in many other countries do not enjoy the same rights and freedoms that we have in Canada. These are enshrined in law in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Among them is freedom of religion - the freedom to live our lives as Christians and to practice our faith publicly. Christians in so many parts of the world do not have this most basic right. While our government currently limits the size of our public gatherings temporarily because of the pandemic, other governments limit gatherings of *any* size for Christians at *any* time. For Christians living in other countries, not being able to gather in public is the norm, not the exception in these unprecedented times.

Thanks to the selfless sacrifice of men and women from generations before us, and the continued sacrifice of the brave men and women currently serving in our armed forces and the police, we

live in a land of peace and security. Our country has not been involved in a major conflict since the Second World War, and there has not been a war on Canadian soil since the War of 1812 - more than two centuries ago. This spring marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. This means that most Canadians have lived their entire lives during the longest period of peace in our country's history. Today, people from all over the world come to Canada as refugees to escape conflict in their homelands.

We are also living in a time where our country is enjoying tremendous material prosperity. With the exception of the economic downturn brought about by the pandemic, it is often said that the Baby Boomer generation is the wealthiest generation in history. Our standard of living is far beyond what any of the first settlers in Canada could ever have imagined. Advances in technology have meant that our lives have been made easier than ever before. And advances in medicine have meant that we can expect to enjoy our lives longer and in better health than ever before.

Despite how great our country is, there is always room for improvement. Not all Canadians have access to good-paying jobs and affordable housing. Not all live in safe communities with good schools. Differences in incomes, standards of living, and opportunities for young people exist throughout the country. We still have work to do to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities, and other marginalized groups enjoy the same opportunities that other Canadians do. And that's not to mention people all over the world who don't have the things that we so often take for granted, and who would give anything for a chance at a better life. We truly are blessed in so many ways.

But with those blessings comes a responsibility to use our position to help those around us. In addition to telling us to give thanks for our blessings, the Bible also tells us to use our blessings to help others. Jesus said, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

This Canada Day, let us celebrate how far we have come as a country, let us commit ourselves to share our blessings with others, and let us look forward beyond the pandemic and our current challenges to a brighter future filled with hope. Our country is truly "a good and perfect gift from above", so let us appreciate that gift and give thanks to the One who gave us that gift. Happy Canada Day everyone!

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