



Message for Canada Day 2024
His Grace Most Reverend Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto

*Eternal God
whose reign extends from sea to sea
and whose care endures throughout the ages,
hear our prayers for our country;
grant wisdom to those who govern it
and respect for human life and dignity to every citizen,
so that justice may flourish
and all peoples live in unity and peace.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.*

(Collect for Canada Day Mass, Roman Missal)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Canada Day to all. As we celebrate Canada's founding in 1867, we welcome the opportunity to give thanks to God for His abundant blessings from sea to sea and pray that He continues to bless, protect, and guide us.

The *Collect* (Opening Prayer) for our Canada Day Liturgy acknowledges God's reign in our country and His care for us¹, reminding us that God not only *creates*, but He also *sustains* (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church/CCC 301). It is through the very *act of creation* that God reveals Himself to us, giving us access through the "natural light of reason" to come to know, love and serve Him faithfully and fruitfully.²

The *Collect* continues, praying for "wisdom to those who govern... respect for human life and dignity to every citizens," it ends with the desire for justice, unity, and peace in our country.³ Contained within these two triplets—wisdom, respect and dignity, justice, unity, and peace—there is an important insight into Catholic Social Doctrine; namely the close connection between life ethics and social ethics.⁴ For justice, unity and peace to exist, good governance, respect for life and the dignity of Canadians is necessary; this is a foundational principal of the Church's social teaching. Pope Francis puts it succinctly writing: "Issues relating to life are intrinsically connected to social questions. When we defend the right to life, we do so in order that each life—from conception to its natural end—may be a dignified life, one free from the scourge of hunger

¹ Roman Missal, *Opening Prayer for Canada Day*.

² Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, Can.2, #1.

³ Roman Missal, *Opening Prayer for Canada Day*.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 15.



and poverty, of violence and persecution.”⁵ The interconnectedness of issues surrounding life and the complexity of social ills can never be separated. Historically the denial of human rights and dignities has led to social upheavals and in some cases the catastrophic loss of human life.

As a community of faith, we strive to build up the Kingdom of God, and we are reminded of the passage from St. Matthew, “Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40; cf. Mt 25:31-46). This is more than a moral axiom to be applied in desperate situations and circumstances; it is a profound Christological truth that points first to the Lordship of Jesus Christ; second to the reality that we are created in the image and likeness of God; and third, the responsibility to care for one another. When we reflect on the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, we are struck by the love of God which moved Him to humble Himself, to embrace the poverty of the human condition so that He might raise us up and we might participate in His divine life (cf. CCC 460). The *mandatum* in St. John’s Gospel to love one another as He has loved us (cf. Jn. 13:34-35), is an invitation to abide in the love of God and extend His communion to all we meet.

In my Pastoral Letter, “Seeking the Kingdom of God Above and Beyond all Other Things,” I invited the faithful of the Archdiocese of Toronto to take concrete measures to make the Kingdom present and undo some of the modern-day distortions we experience daily. I proposed a list of twelve efforts, one for each month. During the month of July, I suggested that we seek out opportunities to spread and strengthen the Kingdom of God by working intentionally for truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace. I would like to take this opportunity to renew that invitation and pray that we take seriously our baptismal call to holiness and service as a Church.

On this Canada Day we celebrate with joy the founding of our country and acknowledge with humility the mission we have been given by Our Lord himself. As citizens of God’s Kingdom and of this world as well, we recognise the abundant blessings we have been given here in Canada and strive to extend those blessings to others. Let us never tire of seeking God’s glory, of desiring to fulfill His holy will, of embracing His purpose for our lives and for our world, of reaching out and making a difference in the lives of our fellow Canadians. May God bless you and your families and friends on this Canada Day. St. Joseph, Patron Saint of Canada, pray for us.

Sincerely Yours in Jesus with Mary,

Most Rev. Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto

⁵ Pope Francis, *Message on The Occasion of The International Conference "Women and The Post-2015 Development Agenda: The Challenges of The Sustainable Development Goals?"*, 22 May 2015.