



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2014
The Most Reverend Paul-André Durocher,
Archbishop of Gatineau
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

As I write this Christmas message, barely a week has gone by since Remembrance Day, a day marked by the still fresh memory of the recent assassinations of two members of the Canadian Armed Forces. This year, Christmas in Canada will take on a different shading, muted and somber, because of these events which have saddened our hearts and our spirits. Many voices proclaimed that Canada “lost its innocence” in October 2014. I understand and sympathize with that feeling. However, we should remember that our country's history has been scarred by many episodes of sporadic violence: the kidnapping of Chief Donnacona by Jacques Cartier, the assassination of Member of Parliament Thomas D’Arcy McGee, the violent death of demonstrators during the Winnipeg general strike, the assault on the Quebec National Assembly, the Montreal massacre at the *École Polytechnique*. These examples, among many, should dispel our illusions. And it's not just our past. Our present also confronts us with gang crimes, sexual assaults, family violence and workplace harassment. All of this convinces me that, sadly, we are not as innocent as we like to believe.

The good news is that Christmas carries with it this marvellous, nearly unbelievable hope: that innocence can be recovered. In a world marked by violence, disfigured by the scars of wars, of murders, of exploitation and injustice, a Child is born to whom has been given the unexpected title of "Prince of Peace". Newborn children make us dream of innocence. Faced with a defenceless child, our hearts are softened, our passions calmed, our fantasies made warm and loving. But the Child of Bethlehem is not only a source of dreams: he calls us to decision, to a foundational commitment in favour of truthful love. He himself would grow up to become the Prophet of a new world where justice, peace and joy would reign. On the Cross, he confronted human violence at its worst ... and responded with mercy and forgiveness, thus uncovering for the world new ways to reconciliation and freedom. His Resurrection revealed to his friends the ultimate meaning of life, woven through with surprising grace and life-giving Spirit. This is the mystery we celebrate at Christmas.

For in Jesus, innocence can be recovered, healed and renewed. Each of us is invited to open our hearts to this Good News, to make it our own, to share it with family, with friends, with an entire country. We celebrate Christmas at the time of year when nights are longest. Is this not a sign that innocence can surge forth at the very moment we believed it lost? Let us therefore not be afraid to wish each other a joyful Christmas. Let us especially not be afraid to live it!

+ Paul-Andre Durocher

4 December 2014