

Welcome to the Cathedral tonight – well done braving the snow ! I hope you enjoy being here : the atmosphere, the surroundings, the music and this service

Depuis 150 ans des gens de Montréal ont quitté leurs maisons chaudes pour célébrer Noël dans ce vieux bâtiment, entre ces murs - ces vieilles pierres ont vu pas mal de la vie !

Christmas is a time filled with memories. Memories of a childhood far away, or perhaps here in Montreal - waiting for Santa, presents under the tree, and sad memories too, as we miss people who are no longer with us : parents, partners, friends – our own past.

And our memories of a past faith – different times, when it seemed easier to believe in a virgin birth, angel choirs, poor shepherds and travelling wise men. Christian certainty seems a very long way away as we party with our friends : who are Jewish and Muslim and Hindu and Buddhist and who are worshipping God in their own way.

Après tous – qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, ce bébé dans une mangeoire ? Encore une histoire religieuse, encore Dieu qui nous parle – mais comment ? C'est quoi ce Prince de la Paix en deux mille quatorze ?

Peace - [La Paix](#) - has been pretty elusive this year: over 2000 killed in Gaza; perhaps 200,000 in the Syrian Civil war; 200 schoolgirls kidnapped in Nigeria; Seven and a half thousand dead in the Ebola epidemic; the beheading of charity workers and journalists; and now the incomprehensible massacre of 145 children in Peshawar, soldiers shot in Ottawa, police officers shot in New York.

Even I, who believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and like to think that I'm on his payroll, still wonder where Peace is to be found.

Ce petit bébé Jésus, tout confortable dans son lit, avec des gens autour qui chantent leurs chants de Noël, tout ça nous rassure dans ce monde difficile et dangereux - mais seulement d'une manière évasive - une sorte de conte de fée déconnectée de la vie réelle, si nous ne nous posons pas de questions.

Worse still, – instead of warm and generous heart, a message of Peace and joy and goodwill to all people : we see that faith in God gives some people a narrow minded world view which has no place for people of other faiths, no place for the equality of women and men together, no place for gay people, and no answer to a world where men kill children in the name of God.

Yes, the Christmas Jesus lying in a manger is cute – but religion can so easily look like a fantasy for the weak, an argument for the bigoted and an excuse for the wicked to do inexcusable things if we let it - and why would any good person want anything to do with that?

Well - because all that is not what Jesus in a manger is all about. Let me say it here, and let me say it loudly : Jesus does not say 'kill in my name' Jesus does not say 'discriminate or abuse in my name'. Jesus does not say 'treat other people as if they are going to Hell, in my name'. That is a travesty of the Good News – and it has nothing to do with Christianity as far as I am concerned.

Mais – par cette nuit de Noël enneigée - Jésus nous dit 'Venez voir' 'Venez comprendre le message de Noël de cette crèche familière' - Vous n'y voyez pas de roi tyrannique qui règne sur un pays par la violence – non . Vous n'y voyez pas un soldat fort qui tue au nom de son Dieu – non. Et avant que vous ne me le dites – vous ne voyez pas non plus de personnage religieux qui prêche d'en haut – mais, pour me défendre - Jésus fera ça un peu quand il est devenu grand !

No – tonight we see a baby who cannot speak, a baby who depends on parents for everything, a baby in the 1<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of diapers.

We say, in our hymns and creeds that God became human at Christmas ... so here is a message for us in 2014. Our human race, which likes to think of itself as God, needs to learn again how to become human. We need to rediscover our humanity towards each other.

Nous, les peuples, les individus, les nations, les armées de la terre – nous qui imaginons que nous avons le pouvoir de vie et de mort, qui imaginons que nous avons toute spiritualité à l'intérieur de nous et que nous sommes comme Dieu – il nous faut réapprendre comment agir en êtres humains les uns avec les autres – il nous faut apprendre à être humain – l'incarnation.

And so tonight – whatever you make of church, of rituals and sacraments, of angels and miracles and the ten commandments, of the horror of violence and selfishness, of inequality and suffering - this little Christmas baby, crying in a manger, is a Christmas present from God to remind us year by year – over and over again - of what it means to be human, and how fragile our humanity is, and how terribly easy it is to lose it – how easy it is not to care less – or worse.

For the best of faith – and the best of faith is very good - helps people to become human– and the worst of faith – and the worst is very bad - does the opposite. And in between lies apathy and complacency – which does no harm to anyone, and not much good to anyone either.

So perhaps being ‘born again’ or being ‘saved’ is not some spooky experience or reward for the self-righteous, perhaps it is just being reminded that the primal religion for everyone,

whoever they are and whatever they believe, is simply to live life as a humane human being in this world of ours. If we could do that – whatever we believe - in the towns of Syria and Iraq, in the schools of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the villages of Nigeria and Kenya – and on the streets of Montréal then the human race would be saved –we would know salvation.

Si tout le monde savait vivre avec humanité les uns avec les autres, ce serait comme si nous étions nés à nouveau, pour vivre une vie nouvelle et abondante - le Prince de la Paix aurait son Royaume et les anges du ciel chanteraient 'Gloire à Dieu au plus haut des cieux.'

During the next thirty years of his life Jesus is going to show us what being human means : it's not an easy lesson to learn – humanity is as fragile as a new born baby – but some people pick it up : St Francis of Assisi, Mother Theresa, a woman called Helen in the church I grew up in. And by the grace of God we can too.