

Archbishop Longley's Sermon

SOLEMN VESPERS CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR

Westminster Cathedral, Tuesday, 12 September 2017

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Earlier today Cardinal Cormac's body was received here at Westminster with solemnity and with affection by the Provost and Metropolitan Chapter of the Cathedral. It brought back to mind the morning, seventeen years ago, when he was received and led into the Cathedral for the first time as Archbishop of Westminster at the beginning of his Mass of Installation.

On that occasion there was due solemnity but there was also affection. And there was plenty of hope and joy, the theological virtue and its fruit which characterised Cardinal Cormac's life. These two went before him in his motto *Gaudium et Spes*, they accompanied him to the very moment of his death and they brought him the great peace that was so evident in his final days among us.

We rejoice in our hope of sharing God's glory. St Paul's Letter to the Romans sets before us the link between hope and joy which also spanned the Christian life and the priestly ministry of Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. We have gathered to remember him, to pray for the repose of his soul, to console one another – but above all to praise and worship to God for the remarkable blessings that have come through the Cardinal's life and ministry – just as he would have urged us to do and to do without delay.

It was in Cardinal Cormac's nature and temperament to be impatient for results. This was not the impatience of frustration or irascibility, critical of other's slowness or hesitation. It was the impatience that is borne out of hope – longing to see God's will achieved in the lives of others and for the good of others. It was the impatience that arose from a perceptive nature, whose insights and understanding realised the many possibilities for achieving and doing good long before they were grasped by colleagues and friends.

In the personality of Cardinal Cormac the virtue of hope also awakened a life-long awareness of the God-given potential that lay within people or situations and ultimately within himself. Regarding his own life he lived by the motto which he would often quote: *nemo sibi iudex – nobody can be his own judge*. Even until the very end of his life he would humbly ask the opinions of others about a policy, a decision or a statement that he was considering.

But it was hope that made him joyful as well as peaceful in the decisions that he made. He maintained that when we are faced with making a great decision for ourselves we must come to recognise some joy in the matter before us, for the experience of joy is a measure of our hope. This insight has helped many of those who sought his advice to discover the right way forward. It made him a great friend and it made a great priest and bishop.

For Cardinal Cormac the source of this hope was the prayer which daily united him with Christ. For this reason he would acknowledge, as we must today, that no good thing came from his life except by the grace of Jesus Christ. It is the same Lord, the crucified One, to whom he would turn at the outset of each day and at the end of his life for forgiveness and mercy. It is to the crucified and risen Lord that we turn today to ask pardon and peace for him, knowing that *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

It was hope that led Cardinal Cormac to follow his calling to the priesthood in company with his brothers when other attractive and worthwhile careers lay easily within his grasp as a young man. It was hope that gave him the confidence to accept demanding appointments with grace and enthusiasm as a pastor and formator of pastors. It was hope, deeply embodied within his character and personality, that enabled him to see the potential within situations that eluded others.

This gracious perceptiveness was the root of his yearning for Christian Unity, in tune with the insights of the Second Vatican Council. He believed in and strove for the renewal called for by the Council, not only in individual Christian lives, but in the life of the Church, so that the prayer of Jesus Christ *that they may all be one* might become a reality. And, despite all the struggles of ecumenical dialogue, it was not a misplaced hope that made him accept his appointment as the Catholic Co-chairman of the second phase of ARCIC, the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission, alongside Bishop Mark Santer (who is happily with us here today).

The presence of so many ecumenical friends and representatives of other faith communities is a striking tribute to the difference Cardinal Cormac made in realising the will of Christ for the Church and in achieving the vision of *Nostra Aetate* which sees the goodness and truth of God beyond the household of Christian believers.

Cardinal Cormac's genuine interest in people bore fruit in the hopes that he entertained for their progress and happiness. His ability to read the character and temperament of those he guided has continued to bear fruit for the Church and for her mission. He could often see the potential for good that others failed to recognise in themselves. He has encouraged and enabled men and women of faith, whether ordained, Religious or lay faithful, to take up tasks which they had never imagined or believed themselves capable of fulfilling.

The joy and hope that were dominant themes in Cardinal Cormac's life drew young people to him and he rejoiced in their enthusiasm for the Gospel and their impatience for justice and peace in the world. When Newman University in Birmingham was granted university status in 2014 Cardinal Cormac readily agreed to become its inaugural Chancellor. Filled with hope he had a natural rapport with young people setting out on life's pilgrimage, even while his own was drawing towards its fulfilment.

The virtue of hope deepens trust and, alongside his astuteness and prudence as a bishop, Cardinal Cormac instinctively trusted human nature. And if there were times when this trust was misplaced then he learned to follow the way of St Paul: *we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

In these great moments of prayer, today and tomorrow, we give glory to God through recognising the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit in and through Cardinal Cormac's life - and we remember with gratitude the grace that touched our own lives through the hope-filled words and the joyful deeds that we can never forget. With our dear friend, pilgrim Cormac, we too *rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.*