

The Gift of Perseverance

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Worthing Herald Article

30th August 2019

The fine East Preston food festival came before the Bank Holiday Monday, when I joined the crowds as the Rotary carnival procession turned into Worthing's Steyne. Everyone enjoyed the stalls and exhibitions. Many of the participants were young. Even after the waiting in Grand Avenue and the lengthy walk, they were still dancing, singing and playing.

That perseverance matches the final thoughts in the lovely memoirs, *An English Spring*, of the great Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. In 2000, having served as Bishop of Arundel and Brighton, he moved from his home in Storrington to Westminster Cathedral to be one of the five Roman Catholic archbishops.

He was made Cardinal in a small group that included Jorge Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, now Pope Francis. When age 18, Cormac asked his parish priest in Reading for advice before seminary training: he was told to pray for perseverance. At the end of his own book he quotes the beautiful prayer that John Henry Newman wrote for a happy death. It concluded: 'that in them (glorious saints) and through them all I may receive the gift of perseverance, and die, as I desire to live, in Thy faith, in Thy Church, in Thy Service and in Thy love.'

Before the Bank Holiday I crossed the Solent to act as the starter and commentator at beach sports. Children aged from 8 – 14 in 90 minutes take part in five events, including sack and three-legged racing before trying to jump down the course in a sack. Years ago I was successful in the parents' sack race at our children's primary school. My wife put it down to desperation rather than to talent or to perseverance; she commented that at elections coming second meant no job.

Cormac had been a fine sportsman and musician. Each pastime is improved by observing rules, taking part whenever possible and feeling able to add flexibility and imagination to the conventions. Here is one of his special sentences:

'I admire our pluralist society, but in my view we have to strike a much fairer balance, which recognise the importance of religion and belief and allows a more open and mature accommodation of differences while ensuring that the law prevents harm and protects everyone equally.' He added that religion is not a problem to be solved but a vital contributor to the national conversation. He included the other great faiths.

One worldwide challenge involves us all: it is the basic truth that there will be no true peace in the world without the elimination of dire poverty. Tackling poverty, disease and injustice in the poorest countries is the great moral issue. That knowledge is one of the reasons why I was one of the early campaigners for our country to meet the United Nations commitment to provide 70p in every £100 in official aid, additional to the benefits of freer trade, private enterprise and good government. It took decades to persuade government to reach the target and to keep it. Let us be proud of all that is achieved.

At the Rotary gathering I was delighted to see the charity project for the Gambia. At Rustington, I am pleased each year to see the special efforts for projects in Zambia. One of my contributions was through the democracy activity of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. On behalf of the UK Branch more recently I led a mission to Namibia for training in parliamentary oversight of government spending.

One of the glories of the Commonwealth is the gift of singing and dancing. Another is the mission of our local Lions and Rotary Clubs to have fun and to do good, in our community and around the world.