



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **3rd Sunday of Easter Year A**

***In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me***

Readings: *Acts 2: 14, 22-33, Ps 15, 1 Peter 1: 17-21, Luke 24: 13-35*

For the very few of you who don't already know, I am a lifelong Arsenal supporter – fourth generation actually as my great grandad was the pharmacist at the Woolwich Arsenal when the Gunners started in the 1880s in Dial Square. It is a family illness that I have happily passed on to my children and successive Saturdays are thus marked by joy or despair and every other emotion in between. It cannot have escaped your notice that, in an otherwise disappointing season, the Gunners have, against all the odds, made it to Wembley for the Cup Final. Quite how we will fare against the seemingly unstoppable Blues of Chelsea remains to be seen. But on the day we will, in a strange almost anachronistic part of the pre-match ritual, lift up our voices together in the traditional Cup Final hymn, 'Abide with Me'.

Henry Lyte wrote this great hymn of hope while dying of tuberculosis and his inspiration for it came from today's Gospel, the Road to Emmaus. At the end of the seven mile walk from Jerusalem, the disciples beg the intriguing stranger to stay with them. 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide'. They have been in despair. They had hoped that the prophet Jesus would be the Saviour of Israel but it had all ended in cruelty, death and disaster. The would-be Messiah had met a grisly end on a tree of

torture and shame. The triumphal entry to the Holy City but a few days before had been overturned by conspiracy and wickedness. The hope of the nation lay in a tomb. Indeed even that shrine had been despoiled apparently by the disappearance of His Body.

So it is a dreary, defeated and despairing duo that set out from Jerusalem that Sunday afternoon. Sin and death have been triumphant. Hope and life have been crucified and buried.

Unbeknown to them they are joined by Jesus on the road. Why? Because they are talking about Him, trying to make sense of their discipleship in the light of the Cross. When our hearts are set on Jesus, He accompanies us on the road.

Jesus listens to them as they tell their story (and His). He listens to their sorrow and their wounded hopes. But He does not sympathise in a way that we would naturally recognise as consolatory. He does not say, 'There, there'. On the contrary Jesus rounds on them for their stupidity and failure to understand what is really going on. Jesus explains the Cross in the light of salvation history. In that two hour walk Jesus takes them through the Old Testament to show them how God has set out, from the Fall of Man, to bring us back into His Presence and give us hope of eternal life with Him.

This is not just about the restoration of Israel as a geopolitical entity but about the restoration of the whole people of God into His eternal kingdom. This requires the defeat of Satan, the shattering of the powers of Hell, the road of reconciliation from our sinful nature and the triumph of the divine life over death and the incorporation, the embodying in Christ, of our

mortality into His immortality. This is no little, local fix. This is the universal work of the Church of God, the Body of Christ.

In order to understand that JESUS is the answer, we must understand what the question is and to do that we must know our Old Testament – the very scripture that Jesus grew up with, the very Word which He incarnated in the womb of His Blessed Mother.

The amazing fact is that the Church's primary understanding of the Old Covenant/Testament is grounded in this Resurrection story. It is where Jesus explained it to the disciples. Indeed, on their return to Jerusalem to be with the other disciples, Jesus appears to all of them and, for security of witness to the whole Church of God, repeats this teaching in considerable detail.

But back, for a moment, to Emmaus. The very opening of the meaning of the Scripture and the explanation of the power of the Cross has led those two disciples to reflect that their hearts were 'burning within us'. That is what revelation does. That is how we feel as disciples when God opens His Word to us as we study Scripture. With the disciples we want Jesus to 'abide with us', to be present in our midst. He has done this in study of the Word – and this remains always the first part of our Mass. Our intellectual enquiry is being met and our attention to the understanding of the Faith is being heightened as we listen to Him. And then we come to table with Him. He reveals Himself to our hearts and souls in that transcendent moment of the breaking of the bread. That is the climax of our Mass.

Whatever the result of the Cup Final on the 27<sup>th</sup> May – remember soccer supporters are inconsolable in defeat and insufferable in victory, so pray I won't be with you that evening - whatever the result, I shall be joining my voice to that of Henry Lyte and hymning the eternal triumph of Jesus:

*'Hold thou thy Cross before my closing eyes*

*Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies*

*Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee*

*In life, in death O Lord ABIDE with me.'*

Together, come what may, we will raise the Cup of Victory.

We will raise the Chalice of Salvation.

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