



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Easter Year A

Hallelujah – He is risen indeed – Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

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

There is a lot of stuff in the popular culture about walking. Those of us of a certain generation will recall the pop sensation of the pre-Beatles 1960s when a 14 year old daughter of Russian-Jewish immigrants, with the voice of a thirty year old tenor, burst on the scene with her song, 'Walking back to Happiness'. If I sung the line I can guarantee that you would come back with the liturgical response 'Woompah oh yeah yeah'.

We had the enchanting and agonised harmonies of the Everley Brothers pleading with a lost love to 'walk right back to me this minute'. The gravelly masculinity of Johnny Cash affirming that he would 'walk the line' – that he would remain faithful to his wife and resist the temptations of lonely showbiz touring. Arguably the greatest football anthem is that of Liverpool Football Club, 'You'll never walk alone'.

Today's Gospel is one of the most famous and influential walks in history. It is far and away the longest account of a resurrection encounter with the Risen Lord and its influence on the subsequent life of the Church and her self-understanding nothing short of immense.

The walk itself is some sixty stadia or approx. seven miles – a three hour amble in the afternoon sunshine. Just a tad longer than the weekly portions of the Saints Way cross country Rosary Walk we did in Lent. And it made me reflect a lot on the imagery and reality of the Walk.

First of all a walk is not simply a journey from A to B – though it is that. It is a physical engagement that takes you in a common direction, a common goal. It is an unhurried time. It is a time of reflection and encounter. Facing the same way as your companion(s) the words exchanged are not dependent on body language. There is time for silence, pause, catching the breath, thoughtful response. You get to know one another in a way that is not really available over a table or across an armchair. You are inevitably outdoors, aware of the immensity of the natural world and the smallness of your place in it, the ultimate context of our reality. You are able to absorb the natural beauty of the world and move between silent awe and natural engagement. Both body and soul are engaged. These reflections came home to me powerfully when we were in Lourdes with the children recently and walking into the mountains together, seamlessly moving amongst companions who had been bound together in ties of love and service over the extraordinary week.

A walk is a journey in more than just the physical.

So today's gospel tells us of a walk, a seven mile stroll on the Road to Emmaus. The walkers are despondent. They are defeated, disappointed, disenchanted, hopes shattered and lives to rebuild. There is a commonalty here as they discuss the things of Jesus, the promise and the Passion. As they do so they are joined by Christ Himself, though they do not know it.

This is both a record of the event and a metaphor for all future disciples. As we talk together of the things of Faith, in good times and in bad, we are joined by the Risen Christ Himself, however slow we may be to see it or recognise His Presence.

Courteously the new arrival asks them to tell their story. Christ listens to us, His disciples, as we pour out our griefs and hopes and misunderstandings. It is a model for our own catechising and evangelism. Listening – hearing where the souls we encounter actually are in their journey and understanding. When He has heard them out, He responds. I'm not sure I recommend the next bit as pastorally appropriate for anyone but Christ Himself.

'How thick are you?', the stranger asks. We might find a less abrasive way of putting it. But Jesus is talking to men here who have walked with Him and have clearly not 'got it'. We are then able to put in the corrective, the explanation of the Faith. There is time to do this on a walk. You cannot, after all, easily walk out on a walk.

Then Luke tells us that Jesus spends the next couple of hours unpacking the Scriptures, explaining how, what we now call the Old Testament, the long history of salvation, anticipates, prophesies, points to and is fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord.

Here on the Emmaus Road, Jesus Himself outlines the authority of Scripture, the meaning of the Messianic promise and the theology of the Church. No wonder, as they later reflect, their 'hearts burned within them'. No wonder they don't want Him to 'walk on by' but rather stay and sup with them. And there, in the simple companionship of the wayside inn, over supper, the

other half of the mystery is revealed. The Word has been explained and now, in the breaking of the bread, the Sacrament is unveiled, the secret of the Real Presence is vouchsafed. The journey's end is no longer the end of the journey but the turnaround, the road back to Jerusalem, to the fellowship of the apostolic band, to the call to the mission and ministry of the Church, to the ultimate walk, the pilgrim journey that will see them walk to the four corners of the known world to preach the Risen Christ in strange cities and bring all men to a knowledge of salvation.

They turn homeward. They are 'walking back to happiness' – Woompah oh yeah yeah – or as we say Hallelujah – He is risen indeed – Hallelujah, Hallelujah.