



### **3rd Sunday of Easter Year A: Abide with me**

**Homily by Fr Robbie Low**

***Readings: Acts 2:14, 32-33, Ps 15, 1 Peter 1:17-21, Luke 24:13-35***

When the hordes move up Wembley Way for the Cup Final this year – sadly not including Arsenal supporters – they will be treated to a lot of razzamatazz and popular music.

Once in the ground the mood will eventually settle for the singing of the National Anthem and then, for reasons lost in the mists of time, to a rendition of the great hymn, 'ABIDE WITH ME'. The hymn was first introduced to the football fans in 1927 when the Secretary of the F.A. substituted it for the popular ditty, 'Alexander's Ragtime Band'. For whatever reason it stuck and it stayed.

The author of the great hymn was a man called Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847) – an English clergyman, born in Scotland, schooled in Ireland, opposed to the slave trade and vigorously opposed to Catholic Emancipation. Abandoned by his feckless military father and effectively orphaned by the death of his mother and younger brother, Lyte was informally adopted by the family of his school's headmaster and thence sent to university in Trinity, Dublin.

Ordained in 1815, the year of Waterloo, Lyte got serious about his faith when attending a dying priest who inspired his study of St Paul and his evangelical conversion. He married a much older woman from Marazion

and, because of persistent ill health, spent most of his ministry as perpetual curate of Brixham and pastor of the fishing industry.

His preaching was so powerful that they had to build a bigger church.

But later, when he was touched very deeply by the Oxford Movement, (John Henry Newman and his pals) – he suffered a major rejection by some of his flock. Having taught them to be anti – Catholic, they responded ‘faithfully’ to that injunction and could not abide his growing awareness of the Real Church and the doctrine of the Real Presence.

Lyte’s last sermon to his congregation was on the meaning of Holy Communion. His last literary act, before departing for Italy to ease his debilitating chest problems, was to write that hymn, ‘Abide with me’.

It was his reflection on the imminent prospect of his dying set in the context of today’s gospel passage, the Road to Emmaus.

He had finally grasped the nature of the Eucharistic Presence of Christ and, like those long ago disciples, seen all his hopes come to fruition and understanding in the breaking of the bread. With those disciples, excited by Christ’s full exposition of the Scriptures in that long walk away from Jerusalem, as his evening falls, Lyte echoes their simple and heartfelt prayer to the Risen Lord, ‘Stay with us.’ - ‘ ABIDE WITH ME’.

Though he never made it to Rome, either geographically or theologically, Lyte’s hymn, from the heart of the dying priest, makes clear his longing for that Viaticum which is ‘ Christ with us on the way’ , that encounter with the Jesus and His explanation of the cohesion of the Scriptures and the climax of that encounter in the Mass – the revelation of the Risen Christ in the Breaking of the Bread.

Fired by this encounter, the ancient disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem and the fellowship of what would become, shortly, the Universal Church.

Lyte died on the Way - in Nice, in the Kingdom of Sardinia, where he is buried.

His last words were, ‘PEACE’ and ‘JOY’. May he rest in that peace and joy shared by all who have walked the Emmaus Road and come to recognise Christ in the breaking of the bread. Amen. Alleluia.