

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## The Power Of The Keys

The emblem of the See of Peter is usually represented as a pair of crossed keys, one gold, the other iron or silver; I expect this was in medieval times made to symbolise the spiritual and temporal power of the Popes (who reserved the right to create or confiscate all temporal powers on earth, as well as binding and loosing spiritual goods and duties). If I were a Papal Herald, I would make the Pope's keys into a vast bunch of all sorts and sizes; because the Power of the Keys is not a personal privilege for the man elected to the Papacy, but the sign of a faithful ministry to the People of God: and the people of God are many, not just two.

### What Should We Lock Up?

You may not know that for every 784 Britons there is one person in prison. What is much more amazing is that there is one person in prison in America for every 138 Americans: a total prison population of 2.1 million. Who will free that locked and barred society? How many imprisoned people does that number really represent? What about the wives of imprisoned men (and 50% of the two million are *black men*) find themselves banged up by the imprisonment of their husbands? How many impoverished children are there whose mothers can hardly feed them? What about the victims of crime, unable to overcome their fear and resentment, often living ruined lives because of maiming and murder in their families?

### The Self-Imprisoned

There are millions on the face of the earth who are the prisoners of their own wounded personalities: the obsessed, the compulsive, the addicted, the tormented, the mentally ill, and the many people who simply seem never to have unfolded their petals and bloomed, because they fear their own life or the cast of their personality will never be accepted by others; how often these last are suffering from the unstated, perhaps even unconscious, rejection they have suffered at the hands of their own parents, who have brought them up in a critical and punishing atmosphere. There

are also those who cannot get free of their own past deeds: the loss of family and home, the failure of work or hopes in whatever field.

### “Have You Got The Keys?”

This plaintive question is usually heard coming from a group of people standing helplessly in front of a firmly locked door. The one person everyone is longing to see is the key-holder. That's the sort of Pope I should like to see: an unlocker of doors for people who are shut outside. We sometimes say of Jesus that “he opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers”. In contrast, Jesus himself pointed to the Pharisees as those who “shut up the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither going in themselves, nor letting others enter who want to.” The thought immediately evokes the memory of Pope John XXIII, who called the Vatican Council to open up the windows and doors, and let the fresh air in: yes, and the people of the world too. To have the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven is to hold the keys that matter in the world at large, because they open the ways that lead to life. *What you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in Heaven.* To my mind, this should be the work of Peter: *to break unjust fetters, to undo the thongs of the yoke: to let the oppressed go free, and break every form of slavery.* It is much more the work of Christ to liberate than to imprison, just as God is the God who liberated his people from Egypt and brought them home from Babylon.

### What You Bind On Earth

I think the Church has to batten some things down onto the decks, as it passes through the thrills and spills of the world. We have values the world wants to erode from us. I also think that the Church can tie up the devil by its diligent faithfulness to prayer and community. We can all accept what Jewish believers call the binding of Isaac, when we close off the paths by which we know we can come into danger. But I still believe that Peter's Keys are most of all for unlocking, a sign of the authority of the eldest son over the

doors of the Father's house.

*Fr Philip*