

Free

The difference between a pessimist and an optimist is that an optimist thinks keys are for unlocking doors. The Solemnity of SS Peter and Paul is frequently celebrated as what the Italians call *testa del Papa*, the Holy Father's day. I wonder what U1e many have seen in that Petrine symbol of the crossed keys? Optimism or pessimism? Cross and locked up In the middle of the last century a Pope arrived that everyone loved on sight. Pius XI's given name was John Mastai-Ferretti, and he came in on a wave of optimism, because his predecessor Gregory XVI was a touch oppressive; Pius began his reign by a general amnesty of all political prisoners and exiles (the Pope being still sovereign of U1e Papal States) and even showed himself favourable to the cause of united Italy. Alas, by 1850 he had lost all his liberal ideas, and became a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary; when Italy was united, by an 1870 pincer-movement between Garibaldi from the south and Victor Emmanuel from the north, the Pope withdrew into the Vatican palace, and refused to come forth until the day he died (1878) His successors seemed to feel obliged to follow suit until 1929, when a rather shady pact was signed with Mussolini's Italy, and little by little the Pope let himself be seen -first On the balcony of the Vatican Basilica, then in the Piazza, and at last travelling between basilicas, and even popping twenty miles out to Castel Gandolfo for the hols.

How different from the home life...

... of our own dear Pope, known as the Bishop *from* rather than *of* Rome; he has thought little of distances, appearing in every possible part of the world, making the Papacy a presence in the world as never before. Whatever one says about the Vatican, or the Papacy, as an

historical reality - and many of the stories are pretty hideous - one has to admit that John Paul II has never stayed locked up in a palace. In this way he has been a key-bearer for his own great office. Far more, he may without exaggeration be claimed as a world-wide figure of liberation; his deeds, building on those of his predecessors, surely were instrumental in tearing down the Iron Curtain

Set My People Free

The great story of our faith -from Abraham onward -is the story of a people set free. It is the Pope's vocation *to bind and to loose* we easily conclude that we are going to end up in cuffs! To be true to the Scripture it must be the devil that is bound, and the people that is freed: *For the Lord loveth his people, and crowns the humble with salvation; the faithful exult in their glory, and shout for joy as they worship him, praising God in the heights with their voices: a two-edged sword in their hands: to load their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment passed: this honour is for all his faithful!* This is the end of Ps 149, and it suits the Exodus as it does the Resurrection; the powers of darkness are bound, on earth as in heaven: and the people are freed to praise God.

The Power of the Keys

Every Catholic should want this sort of key-power. Every Catholic should want to see the end of the power of evil, even at the cost of his own change of heart. (liberation is most uncomfortable for the slave -read the book of Numbers!) and to be free is the great gift of God to his people. I long to be free of so much that ties me up and enslaves my responses to God. May the power of the keys be upon us!
Fr Philip