

## Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

In my pockets there is an embarrassment of keys: access to the house, the church, the office, sacristy, safes, and cupboards require me to clank around with twenty-two keys on my person, in addition to another half-dozen I conceal in my various places of work. No wonder my coat was referred to as "a security-blanket" the other day. A little while ago I lost my car keys in the centre of Derby. Fortunately help was at hand, and I had left a master-key in a safe place. It took a great deal of time, trouble and expense to replace what I had lost. The sheer frustration of standing in a car-park, ransacking my pockets for a key I couldn't find, will be with me for a long time.

### A Locked Humanity

A baby has to meet all sorts of challenges in order to achieve competence: but there is a tide running in its favour. Most babies, it seems, do the impossible, and learn to speak, to walk, and to wash behind their ears; it takes time and determination, but it comes right. However, there is a further challenge to be met that isn't resolved so naturally. Sooner or later most of us find ourselves "locked out" of the humanity we want to inherit; we feel a sort of omelessness, or lack of fulfilment, or unrealisable desire, which we cannot solve by ourselves. *What comes naturally* is falling short for us, and we need something more than we can earn or achieve, if we are to make our way in to life. It is in this realm of frustration and hope that the concept of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" may be vital. St Paul says that creation was made unable to realise its purpose, and this is something we can all come to feel quite personally and distinctly. The things I can't master, can't accomplish, perhaps can't even express, come to dominate me, and my life feels too small, too poor, and too powerless. I need a liberation from the poverty which I suffer in my individuality, my loneliness. I need the Church.

### Revelation from the Father

Peter is given the keys of heaven *because he has received a revelation from God*. This is

something more than God's gift of life and human wisdom, great as those gifts are. We are given those things as we enter the world, as babies. But Peter needs a special gift before he can welcome Jesus as *the Christ, the Son of the Living God*. This gift -a revelation from God makes him worthy to receive the keys which will open (or, mysteriously, *close*) the Kingdom. Lest we think of this as a personal gift to Peter, Jesus goes on to speak of *founding his Church on this Rock* -that is, on Peter's faith in what God has revealed to him. This clearly means that the Apostle is entrusted with keys which can open for all the rest of us.

### The Pope and the Catholic Church

We Roman Catholics discern in the Papacy the embodiment of that Rock, which can found the unity of the Church in our day: there is no other institution in the Christian churches which has such prestige or pre-eminence. Many ecumenical commentators are agreed that, if the Church is to be re-united, it must be around the See of Peter. But the style of its leadership is very much questioned. How will the minister of the Church's unity -the Supreme Pastor, as the Vatican calls him - exercise his ministry? It will be in the spirit of Christ alone that this ministry can be restored to its rightful place. Certainly the Papacy has been much cleansed and chastened from its worst days, and in the present Pope we have seen a ministry of sacrificial care and great spiritual power. The prejudices, as well as the genuine concerns of other Christians must continue to be answered, until the key-bearer can be recognised by all. This isn't a question of sectarian ambition. If Christ gave the keys to Peter, we need that gift as Jesus gave it. We need Peter: we need his ministry, in order to be the Church. *Fr Philip*