

The Miami Herald recently carried a classified ad which read as follows: "Pope John is Coming!!! Sales and profits can be yours." Pope John Paul will be arriving in Miami on September 10, and souvenir makers are marketing a procession of products for the occasion. People going out to see the Pope can wear t-shirts of all sizes and colors. In San Antonio the best seller reads "The Original Vatican Animal" and pictures Spuds MacKenzie in a papal hat and robe. Or you can wear your own paper hat and a mask that looks like the Pope. They even sell a ring with red lips attached. When you kiss it, it'll kiss you back. If you stand at the back of the crowd you can buy a Popescope to see over everybody else. If you stay at home, you can hang up photos of Clint Eastwood and John Paul II which bear the inscription, "Thou Hast Made My Day." Or you can buy a lawn sprinkler which ~~sprays~~ sprays water from the palms of an image of the Pope. It sells for \$55 under the name, "Let Us Spray."

Already there have been books on the market. Marvel presents the Comic Book version of the life of John Paul. You can build your own Vatican by cutting out the paper pieces and gluing them into St. Peter's Basilica right in your own living room. One of my favorites, though, is this collection: Pope John Paul II, Paper Dolls in Full Color.

Why do we do this? I'm not sure. At its best it's a valid way to express our joy at the coming of the Pope. At its worst it's a way of trivializing the role of the Pope so people don't take his message too seriously. Commercialization creates a throw-away image of the Church. Clearly the Pope is not the entire Church, we are the Church, and he represents who we are.

So, in the thick of the marketing of John Paul II, it's good to be reminded what was the image Jesus used for the foundation of the Church. Not paper, not a ring, not a lawnsprinkler. A rock. Something sturdy, something reliable. Something so strong that the gates of hell have no power against it.

Now, I know sometimes the Church may not seem so reliable. Maybe you'd like some rules changed, maybe someone who works for the Church once hurt you. Or maybe the Church seems to have too many other characteristics of a rock: stubborn, thick, unmovable. When I was in school in Rome we used to take people over to Vatican City and tell them, "Welcome to the dead center of the Catholic Church." The Church is human, but Christ gave us the Spirit to overcome that.

How does the Church remain strong? That's the question. How can we keep the image of being reliable amid so many paper dolls? We can remember that we are the Church. If we practice sturdiness, we will be strong. When we are faithful to ourselves, our family and friends, to prayer, to the parish, we reinforce the house built on rock.

We have the power to bind or to loose. We can carry grudges, we can set others free. If America is to look through its Popescope and see the Church as a rock, America will do so only if we are that rock, faithful to each other and faithful to our God.