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Image of the day

**The Temple of the Winds, at the Bishop's Palace,
Downhill, Castlerock**

Orange Institution opposes Secretary of State's intervention

The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland opposes the steps currently being taken by the Secretary of State Brandon Lewis MP to override the powers of the devolved administration in Northern Ireland. A statement continued -

The Secretary of State's decision to intervene and force through abortion laws here in Northern Ireland – without the consent of the Executive at Stormont – does nothing more than further undermine our confidence in the political system at this time.

This brings further frustration given that devolution is clearly being set aside on this moral issue, yet our calls for Government action on other key issues have fallen on deaf ears. This crass action feeds into increasing political instability in Northern Ireland.

As an Institution founded on Christian principles, the Orange Institution believes in the sanctity of human life and the personhood of the individual in the eyes of God from the moment of conception. The right to life is a fundamental human right which must be protected.

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The actions of the NIO undermine devolution and the mandate of our locally elected politicians, many of whom are committed to protecting the fundamental right to life in opposing the proposed abortion legislation.

Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland withdraws from the Shared Island Unit

The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland has withdrawn from the Shared Island Unit, set up by the Republic's coalition government to foster good relations, as anger continues to grow among unionists at the Northern Ireland Protocol.

In a letter sent to Taoiseach Micheál Martin on Wednesday, the loyalist fraternity accused the Irish government of showing "scant regard for the views of the unionist community".

"The Orange family will not play any part in a process that masquerades as two neighbouring jurisdictions improving relationships for the benefit of both countries when in reality they pursue an agenda that enforces a Protocol that normalises and 'talks up' the inevitability of a United Ireland," the letter states.

Catholic bishops and EU Commission 'face this historic period together'

EU Bishops last week held their second online assembly since the beginning of the pandemic.



In dialogue with Margaritis Schinas, Vice President of the European Commission, the Bishops discussed some of the most pressing topics on the EU agenda, highlighting the need to work together in facing this historic period marked by the pandemic and climate crisis.

They discussed the current status of the recovery process in the EU and its Member States. The Assembly emphasized the importance of people-centred and value-based EU policies to protect the poor and the most vulnerable, especially in light of worsening socio-economic conditions caused by the pandemic.

Vice President Schinas - who is also the Commissioner responsible for Article 17 TFEU - acknowledged the commitment of the Catholic Church to promote the European project and conveyed willingness to move the EU-Churches dialogue towards policy-based exchanges.

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The participation of the EU Commissioner was also an occasion to discuss the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, proposed in September 2020 by the European Commission. While recognizing the efforts to set out a new and comprehensive framework aimed to create a fair and predictable migration management mechanism, the EU Bishops urged all negotiating actors to promote a welcoming context as well as a fair and just approach to those in need.

"We have to work to ensure the full respect of the individual right to apply for asylum for anyone reaching the EU territory, without pushbacks at our borders," the COMECE Assembly stated.

Climate change and its ecological impact in third countries are also provoking large influx of migrants to the EU. The EU Green Deal the Bishops stated - would be beneficial not only for the EU, but also for peoples in third countries who suffer the effects of climate change in their daily lives."

During the Assembly, Bishops also analysed current trends on Freedom of Religion across the EU, expressing their concerns for the rise of religious illiteracy, which can often lead to negative perceptions of religion.

In discussing recent restrictions to freedom of religion - e.g. Covid-19 measures, ritual slaughter of animals, religious symbols at the workplace - the Bishops underlined the importance of a dialogue with public authorities, while avoiding self-censorship and fostering interreligious initiatives to promote this fundamental right.

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Gilnahirk parishioner takes on 75km walking challenge



A cancer survivor from east Belfast has begun a 75 km walking challenge to raise funds for charity, just 4 months after surgery for a cancer that made sitting and walking unbearably painful.

Suzanne Shepherd (73) and a parishioner of St Dorothea's, Gilnahirk, was diagnosed with cancer in late June 2020. She received urgent surgery in August and again in November, spending a total of 31 nights in hospital. Now she is celebrating her recovery with a week-long walking challenge on the roads around her Belmont Road home to raise funds for her favourite charity, Christian Aid Ireland.

Suzanne expressed her gratitude for the medical and nursing care she received, particularly at a time when NHS resources were focused on the coronavirus pandemic:

“I feel very lucky to have received my surgery because I know that many patients had their operations cancelled

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because of coronavirus. And although it was a shock to find out I had cancer, I'm so thankful that the operations have taken away the pain I'd suffered which had become quite unbearable."

Suzanne is one of Christian Aid's most dedicated supporters. Her fundraising over many years has raised many thousands of pounds and until lockdown last March, she was also volunteering weekly in the charity's Belfast office. Christian Aid Ireland Chief Executive Rosamond Bennett praised Suzanne's stoicism and generosity:

"Suzanne is a truly exceptional lady, always cheerful, thankful and focused on the needs of others. Like so many of our most dedicated supporters, Suzanne shows great love and compassion for the suffering of others even when facing difficulties in her own life."

Despite last year's health scare, Suzanne explains that the greatest sorrow of her life came in 2013. She and her husband Derek were on a flight returning from a once-in-a-lifetime holiday to New Zealand when he became unwell, collapsed and died.

It's a loss that Suzanne is still coming to terms with but it hasn't diminished her appetite for charity work. And Christian Aid isn't the only good cause to benefit from her generosity. Suzanne spent 50 years as a volunteer leader with Girlguiding Ulster and twenty years fundraising for Marie Curie. Her charity work even earned her a BEM in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2013.

Solidarity

This week's walk around the roads of east Belfast – one kilometre for each year since Christian Aid was founded 75 years ago – is Suzanne's gesture of solidarity with the many women in developing countries who set off each day on long and often dangerous journeys on foot. Climate change has brought drought to countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, and women are having to walk further than ever in search of water for their families and livestock.

Suzanne's challenge was inspired by Rose Jonathan (69) who lives in Dili village in the Kitui region of Kenya. During the dry season, Rose walks for seven hours a day to collect water for herself and her family – the six grandchildren she cares for alone since her husband died and her daughters moved to the city for work. Suzanne explained why Rose's story touched her particularly:

“Rose and I are of a similar age and we have both been widowed. But where I am choosing to walk, and I'm grateful I'm well enough to take on this challenge, Rose has no option but to walk for miles every day in search of water.”

Elsewhere in Kenya, Christian Aid has built a sand dam (a low-tech water source) for Florence Muthiani and her community, just a short distance from her village. With easy access to water, Florence has been able to grow fruit and vegetables to feed her family and surplus to sell for cash. She also manages 10 beehives and sells the honey for cash at the market.

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Before the water source was built, Florence would spend 8 hours a day collecting water but now she has time to develop her farm business. She has a cow, a donkey, two turkeys as well as some goats and sheep. Florence told us: “I am very happy now. I have strength and power. I have learned to depend on myself.”

To support Christian Aid’s work, visit Suzanne’s Justgiving page at the link below: [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/suzanne75]

Books, Broadcasts, resources and webinars

Lives Reflected – A Belfast Cathedral Initiative

Lives Reflected is an initiative created by Belfast Cathedral, that looks to remember and honour the lives, memories, sacrifices and work done by all those affected by the COVID–19 pandemic in our community, no matter their background or faith.

If someone you love or care for has died during the COVID–19 pandemic and you were unable to have a proper goodbye for them, you are encouraged to remember them on this site.

Read the Dean's welcome, View Memorial, Submit a tribute

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[[] <https://livesreflected.com/?fbclid=IwAR2PGxFwXLX197qEzvvgbptANb6f0zBCZ17LV7NHAhenUGVLXzqIZ0lwYGI>]

The Parables, by Paula Gooder

Of all recent books on the parables, this unpretentious volume is the best. The author seems to have read everything, but every piece of knowledge produced contributes to the understanding of the message of Jesus and the Evangelists.

It is all simply explained in a way that shows the author's respectful love both for her readers and for all the characters who appear in her narrative. Even the Pharisees are treated sympathetically. We meet all the characters on friendly terms and on their own ground, the boy herding half-a-dozen sheep and a couple of goats, the wealthy farmer who owns a hundred sheep, and so probably has a slave-helper. One can feel the hard soil of the stony hills of Galilee and the hunger of the labourers waiting for their meagre pay on a lucky day of full employment.

The third volume in the Biblical Explorations series from bestselling New Testament writer Paula Gooder explores a major exponent of the Gospels: the parables of Jesus.

Covering every parable, this volume focuses on some of the best-known stories in the gospels, mining their meaning afresh today. It considers why Jesus spoke in pictures and opens up the world behind the parables to reveal just how striking, memorable and challenging they were for their original hearers.

Biblical Explorations is an exciting series that offers an accessible and informed study of the best loved texts in

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Scripture. Rooted in the conviction that greater understanding of the Bible leads to deeper discipleship, it is an essential resource for preachers, teachers and study group leaders, as well as those who simply wish to get to know the Bible better.

Amazon 14.29

The Science and Religion Forum - Online Conference 2021

26th - 28th May 2021. Speakers and Titles

The Gowland Public Lecture: **'Transformative Creatures: Theology, Gender Diversity and Human Identity'** – Prof. Susanna Cornwall with Rev. Canon Dr Rachal Mann responding.

'What can science and biblical scholarship say about human identity as imago Dei' – Prof. Mark Harris

'Neurology and religion: the role of clinical case studies in understanding the relationship between the brain and faith.' – Rev. Dr Joanna Collicut McGrath

'What Experimental Approaches can Contribute to Understanding the Psychobiological and Social Effects of Religion' – Dr Miguel Farias

'Psychopathology and Religious Experience: Towards a both-and approach' – Dr Tasia Scrutton

'All in the Head?: Spiritual Technologies and the New Science of Psychedelics' – Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie

There will be opportunities for Q&A and discussions with speakers throughout the conference.

[[] <https://www.srforum.org/2021-online-conference>]



HOLY WEEK & EASTER

at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin

Holy Week and Easter take us on a journey through darkness and despair to victory and hope. During the Covid-19 restrictions and the Cathedral closure we invite you to worship on-line at the Cathedral and journey with Jesus from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday, when he shared supper with his disciples, to his death on a cross on Good Friday; and on to Easter Day when he rose from the dead to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

PALM SUNDAY · 28 March

09.15 Said Eucharist | 11.15 Sung Eucharist | 15.15 Choral Evensong

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK · 29 March

13.00 Organ Recital | 17.30 Evening Prayer with Holy Week Reflection

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK · 30 March

17.30 Evening Prayer with Holy Week Reflection

WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK · 31 March

17.30 Evening Prayer with Holy Week Reflection

MAUNDY THURSDAY · 1 April

17.30 Choral Eucharist & Stripping of the Altar

GOOD FRIDAY · 2 April

11.15 Choral Matins | 14.00 Le chemin de Croix

EASTER SUNDAY · 4 April

09.15 Said Eucharist | 11.15 Choral Eucharist | 15.15 Choral Evensong

Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/easter

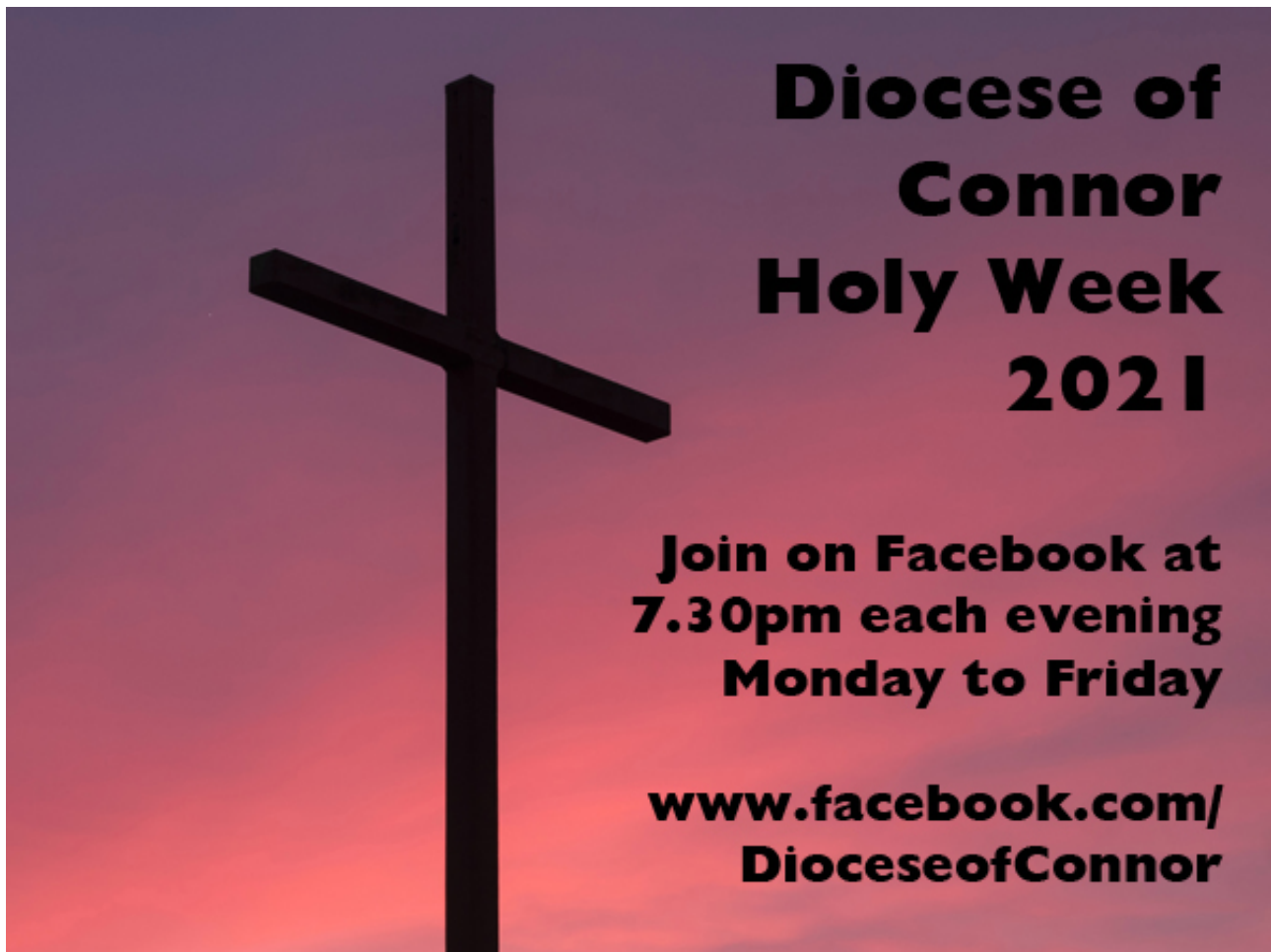
www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/easter

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Daily Prayer: Common Worship Morning and Evening Prayer

The Church of England

[<https://cofe-daily-prayer.captivate.fm/>]



Connor Diocese Holy Week Services

Shared online each evening at 7.30pm on the Connor diocesan Facebook page. The services will be led by clergy from around the diocese.

Inviting people to share in the services, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, said: “If you’re not already joining in worship provided locally in your own parish, I’d love to encourage you to join us in these

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diocesan services – each with its own style and offering us an insight of worship in different settings.”

“May it help each one of us to remember all that Jesus suffered so that we might be forgiven and prepare ourselves for the great celebration of God’s new life at Easter.”

The schedule of services is as follows:

Monday March 29: Mid Belfast Rural Deanery

Tuesday March 30: The Ven Barry Forde, Archdeacon of Belfast and chaplain at the Hub

Wednesday March 31: The David Ferguson, rector of Ramoan and Culfeightrin

Maundy Thursday, April 1: The Ven Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor and vicar of Antrim

Good Friday, April 2: The Rev James Boyd, rector of Derryvolgie

www.facebook.com/DioceseofConnor

Media review

Sharp Dáil exchanges over restrictions on religious services

The Irish Times

Independent TD Michael Collins said “the schools in this country are allowed open but the churches are not”. He said Ireland is the “third country in the ...

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/sharp-d%C3%A1il-exchanges-over-restrictions-on-religious-services-1.4520433>]

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Coronavirus latest: Ireland stands firm on Easter church closures despite backlash

Financial Times

Olivier Véran, health minister, announced the enhanced restrictions for the Nièvre, Rhône and Aube départements at a news conference on Thursday.

[[] <https://www.ft.com/content/7d318deb-bf61-4b7c-8da3-cabe6638cd36>]

Northern Ireland death rate increases in the last quarter of 2020

Belfast Telegraph

New official figures for Northern Ireland show there were fewer marriages, more births and a higher death rate in the last quarter of 2020 as Covid-19 raged.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) released provisional data on local registrations for the period covering October 1 to December 31 last year.

A total of 4,786 deaths were registered in this period, showing the rate of deaths per 1,000 had increased to 10.1 from 8.1 in the previous quarter.

Covid-19 was the underlying cause of death in 819 cases (17.1%) in the final quarter, and the total for 2020 was 1,626 (9.2%).

In the same quarter, cancer accounted for 1,130 (23.6%) deaths, non-Covid respiratory conditions for 444 (9.3%), and heart disease for 396 (8.3%).

A total of 44 suicides (including events of undetermined intent) were registered in the last quarter, with the 2020 total 263.

More at -

churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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[[] <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/northern-ireland-death-rate-increases-in-the-last-quarter-of-2020-40236805.html>]

PSNI has 'one of highest rates of stop and search but lowest arrest rate'

Irish News

Of 25,021 stops where ethnicity was recorded, people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds accounted for 1,026 stops, or 4.1 per cent - despite making up only 1.8 percent of the population

Covid-19: NI Catholic churches make cautious reopening

BBC News

The Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Northern Ireland will resume in-person services from Good Friday, 2 April. The four ...

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56535024>]

Western Trust marks Day of Reflection on lockdown anniversary in Derry, Omagh & Enniskillen

Derry Journal

... Fr Kevin McElhennon (Catholic) and Cannon Derek Quinn (Church of Ireland), led a Day of Reflection Prayer Walk, through the Hospital Grounds.

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[[] <https://www.derryjournal.com/news/people/western-trust-marks-day-of-reflection-on-lockdown-anniversary-in-derry-omagh-enniskillen-3177831>]

Calls for communities minister to 'account for the clear disparities' in £22 million sports hardship fund

Irish News

Mark H Durkan of the SDLP said Deirdre Hargey "needs to immediately explain her role in administration" of the Sports Sustainability Fund "before she signed off on the millions of pounds of public money"



Pointers for prayer

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of wilderness and water,
your Son was baptized and tempted as we are.
Guide us through this season,
that we may not avoid struggle,
but open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance
and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and
simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy
friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus, in the days before his passion,
offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears,
we pray for those who suffer, those who are in need,

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and those who seek reconciliation...

God of compassion,
you know our faults and yet you promised to forgive.
Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom.
Open our hearts to gladness,
call dry bones to dance,
and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.

God of suffering and glory,
in Jesus Christ you reveal the way of life
through the path of obedience.
Inscribe your law in our hearts,
that in life we may not stray from you,
but may be your people. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

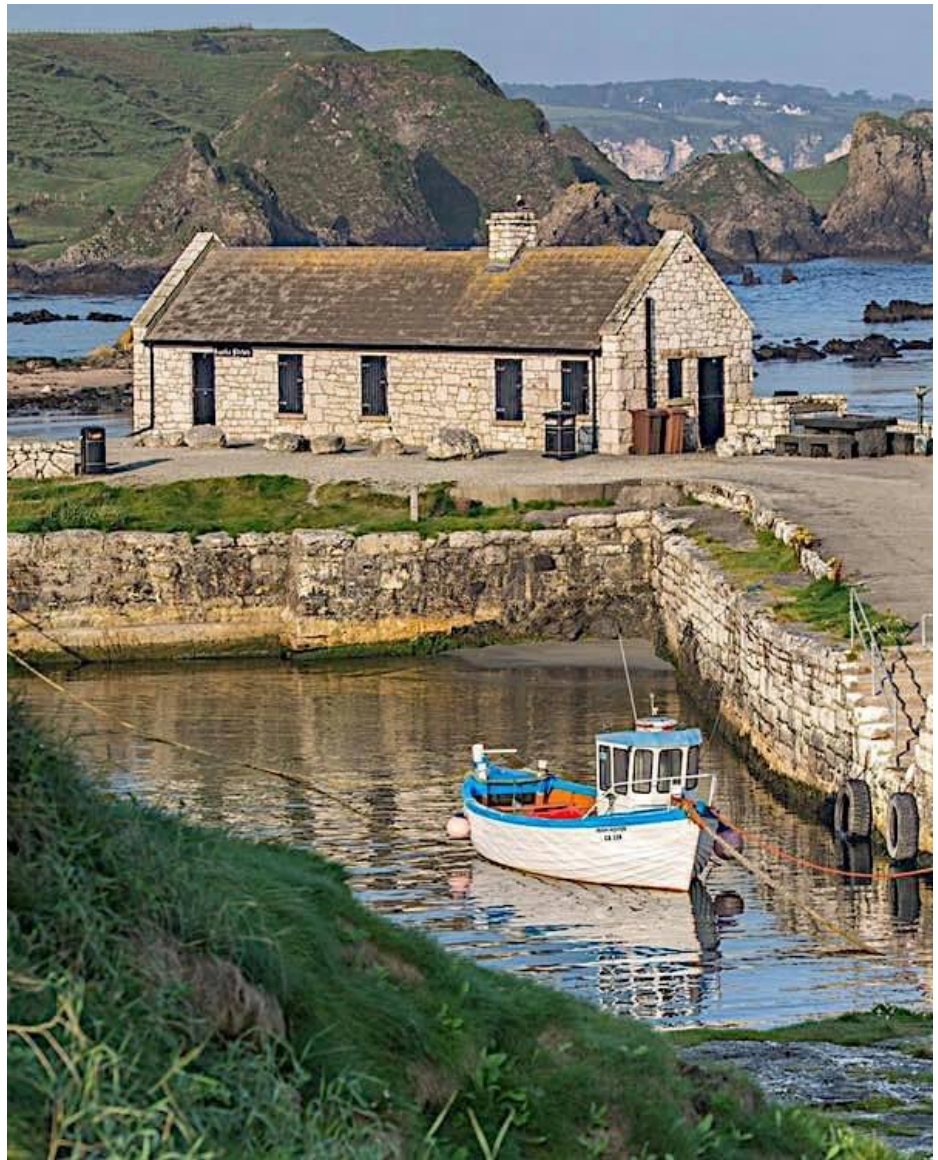
As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar was sitting beside the road.

When Jesus heard him, he stopped and ordered that the man be brought to him. As the man came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord,” he said, “I want to see!” And Jesus said, “All right, receive your sight! Your faith has healed you.” Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus, praising God. And all who saw it praised God, too.
Luke 18:35, Luke 18:40-43 NLT

Jesus knows that he is heading to Jerusalem where he will be killed. But even so, amazingly, he has time for people

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and when he hears a blind man call out he stops and gives him his full attention. From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry he had declared that he had come to bring sight to the blind, in fulfilment of Isaiah 61. But that didn't mean that he had come to impose his healing. He came to offer healing and that's what he does when he meets this blind beggar in Jericho.



Jesus never barges into our lives telling us what's best for us and imposing his will on us. He simply offers himself. On the face of it, it seems strange that Jesus would ask a blind man what he wanted him to do for him because it was so obvious. We know nothing of the circumstances of this man but we might well presume that his blindness was connected to his begging. He lived a life of complete vulnerability and so it was obvious that he needed to receive

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his sight. But even so Jesus respects him as an individual and lets him make the decision.

All of us need the loving touch of Jesus on our lives. We need his forgiveness, his peace, his love and his joy. We are all in desperate need of him, but even so he refuses to impose himself upon us. Today as Jesus knocks at the door of our lives he leaves it to us to make the decision whether we will open it or not.

QUESTION

Will you open the door to Jesus today?

PRAYER

Loving Lord Jesus, thank you that you offer me your life today. I welcome you and invite me to fill me with your Spirit. Amen.

