

WE HAVE EACH OTHER STILL

It's that time of year when winter is fading behind us, and the early spring with its fitful jittering between sleet and sunshine is beginning to steady into the sure promise of oncoming summer. For the younger ones, endless days of light and heat in the great world outdoors become day by day more certain; for the older ones there is the golden flood of memory, of perfect remembered days redolent of salt and hot dust, gardens of promise, play without end, the animal joy of running and jumping with boundless energy. It's a threshold moment, and it never fails to lift and stir the heart. We can feel it everywhere, in our blood and in the world, what Dylan Thomas called "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower." The irresistible surge as the world begins to enter into the full flood of its power.

The cherry blossom is out all over, marking the year's decisive turn towards summer, lifting our hearts, but this year our joy is tempered with sorrow; we think of all those so intimately stitched into our lives with whom we cannot share the joy of it — those who have passed on, those who are held away from us and from each other by the strictures of the lockdown, the pervasive sense of fear. It's as if the natural impulse to rejoice has to be checked, as if somehow we haven't earned it, as if it would somehow be disrespectful to give in to the heart's instinct to rejoice.

I think of Wordsworth's beautiful lines,

"Surprised by joy — impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport — Oh! with whom
But Thee..."

He means his daughter, who had died tragically young, but the lines, surely, resonate with us all. That hesitancy, shot through with intimations of grief.

And yet, in the great ecology of things, the world continues to turn, and we with it, and if we must dig deep into ourselves to find solace, and hope, my sense is that this is the right imperative, the right instinct — that we go on, in gratitude for the gift of life, mindful of ourselves, there for each other.

The roots of ecology are in two Greek words, 'oikos', meaning a dwelling place, a home, and 'logia', meaning to study. For most of us, living through this pandemic has offered an unexpected chance to reflect, to give thought to what we mean to each other, to how much our independent lives are made thin and undernourished if they be deprived of interdependence, that effortless sense that we are all in this together, that we live better, more truly, when we live with and by and for each other. We have become more and more aware that we share our planet home with all humanity, with the creatures and all that grows and may hope to flourish here — a larger ecology, you might say, a sense that if we and the planet are to survive not just the pandemic but the deepening climate crisis, our motto must be 'all of us or none of us'. We are learning, perhaps, that a world not founded in love and justice, in fairness and humility and respect for all that sustains us is not just undesirable, but may even be impossible.

In that Wordsworth poem he goes on to say

"Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind..."

and we have proved that particular truth of memory on our pulses, time and again, this past year. The love of children for their grandparents, their need of each other, the love of friends whom we cannot see and embrace, the remembered love of how we talk and sing and dance together — and what a deprivation it is, to be cheated of that. So, we have learned what memory means to us, how that mysterious power enables us to be close when far away, how without even perhaps knowing we were

doing it, all our lives we have been making and cherishing memories, a store against the unknown future, a source of comfort and a spur to understanding more fully what it is to be truly human.

Unsurprising, then, that we have turned in extraordinary numbers to poetry and music, to film and song and to all the arts — for it is here, as much as anywhere, that love and memory manifest in their highest forms. We are, above all else, language-makers, and those who speak with and for us, in words, in music, in all the languages that the human can make use of, articulate for us all the glory and the terror, the insights and understandings that underpin hope, that articulate interdependence.

Soon, now, we will celebrate our first beginnings as an independent State, in all its imperfections. We will have to ask again, what did those men and women struggle for, and how did it happen that the horrors of Civil War should have followed so hard and fast on the heels of comradeship and solidarity. "Heart lessons there", as Yeats has it. I hope we will face those questions squarely, not in a spirit of argument about what should have been done, who was right and who was wrong, but in a spirit tempered and informed by the present crisis, a spirit animated by our new understanding that what we hold in common is both more urgent and more important than division, separation, the pursuit of dead questions. An awareness of our interdependence.

We have sustained great losses over the past year, but we have also discovered what, somehow, we always knew, that our deepest instinct is to stand together, to mind and look out for each other, blending the optimism of youth with the hard-won wisdom of age.

The astrologers tell us we have entered into the Age of Aquarius, a moment in history when there will be a planet-wide

awareness that every living thing on Earth is woven into one great, vivid and interdependent web of life. You don't have to place any credence in astrology to see that in the shock of the pandemic, in the face of the coming planetary crisis, the lesson is all too plain: if we are to survive, there will be no special cases, no escape clauses for the privileged, no protected niches or refuges — not for the seas, land and cities, not for the creatures and not for ourselves.

The ancient Greek philosopher Theognis of Megara said, memorably, "Hope is the one good god remaining", and there's food for thought in that. Hope is not a passive state, though it has its roots in standing still before the unknown; hope is a choice, a decision to place our faith in positive outcome. Hope is, at Bealtaine, an investment of belief in the summer to come, buoyed up by the steady, reliable, return of the light, the opening out of possibility, of growth, of flourishing.

And so here we stand at that ancient threshold between the promises of spring and the colour-fire of summer to come, faced with the great questions: who can we hope to be, and how do we get there? Now is the moment to take heart and to take thought, to put hand in hand, to start forward together, for and with each other, towards the light out there ahead of us — we are, after all, made fit for the journey.

**Theo Dorgan
Dublin 2021**