

THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN 'AFRICA',
THE MAGAZINE OF THE KILTEGAN FATHERS

A SEPTEMBER MELANCHOLY

Maeve Edwards

Why is it that the advent of September, with all its glorious "apple-ripe" mornings, can sometimes evoke in us a feeling of loss?

Is it an echo of the melancholy we felt as children, with the ending of carefree summer days and the start of another school year?

Or, is it a natural phenomenon that happens to all earth's creatures as the year begins to slowly come to an end.

Even when the late August sun shows no signs of waning, this sadness can sneak up on us and catch us off guard. It might start as an ache, a hint of melancholia in the pit of our stomachs, a longing deep in our hearts.

It might be prompted by the sight of a cobweb, glistening with dewdrops in the early morning light. Or later, at the kitchen sink, an earwig might escape from the dahlias you've cut for your windowsill. And there it is, that stab of yearning, even as you capture the creature and ferry it back outside. And as you place it in the garden, there it is again: that wistfulness, telling us autumn is coming, the year is dying, the days are growing shorter. The grief you thought you had dampened down, threatens to overwhelm. Sometimes your eyes fill with tears, startling even you who thought you had all this sorrow under control.

Most of us have had life-altering events in our lives. Most of us know what it is to suffer the heartbreak of losing a child, a spouse, a dear friend. We have had to learn to pick ourselves up, to salve over the grief, to bury the sorrow deep inside ourselves and face the world with a brave front.

I believe the Irish language deals with emotions in a very good way. There is an Irish word *uaigneas* which we learnt in school as children. It is a deeply evocative word that can mean loneliness, or sadness, or even a sense of solitude when one feels a need to be quiet and alone.

Rather than saying, like we say in English. *I am sad today*, the translation into Irish gives us: *Tá uaigneas orm inniu*. Sadness is upon me today. Sadness is only visiting me today. I will nod at it, recognise it, but it will soon pass. It will soon be gone.

We say the same about happiness: *Tá áthas orm*. Happiness is upon me today. Today, I am happy.

How wonderful though is the Irish way! Rather than the sadness, or happiness, defining us, it is only "upon us" for a time. These emotions will pass. I will recognise them, pay attention to them, but soon they will be gone. They don't permeate my whole being. They don't become me. They don't define me.

The tradition of wearing a black arm band, or a small black diamond sewn onto the upper sleeve of a coat, has mostly died out now in Ireland. What a pity this is.

Being aware that someone is in mourning can spark compassion and an understanding that may not have been there before. It's a signal to be careful, a reminder that we should be gentle in our interactions with that person, a caution that they have lost a loved one.

On a shelf in my living room beside where I sit at night, are four photographs. There used to be three, until recently when I had to admit a fourth. These photographs are of beloved family members and friends who have died, the latest only last November. When I look at the image of one or other of them, I can say: Today, my dear sister, just for a moment, *Tá uaigneas orm* when I think of you.

Living is hard sometimes. It's not easy. We must learn to navigate our way through all the obstacles life throws at us.

And of course, to experience deep grief, we also must know what it is to deeply love. To love and to suffer means we are human beings, we are part of God's rich tapestry of life.

And now, with autumn on its way, with its glorious crisp mornings, and low September sun, we remember Patrick Kavanagh's poem *Raglan Road*, when he bravely accepts the pain that comes with deep affection, saying those words that will always echo deep in my heart: "*And I said, let grief be a fallen leaf at the dawning of the day.*" ■

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