Many years ago I spent a summer at a parish in central Guatemala with some Catholic missionaries. There was a priest from the US, one from Belgium and one who was a Mayan Indian, Father Chepe. Chepe was originally from a remote, and we would say primitive village, no plumbing, no electricity, 30 kilometres from the nearest town. His family had lived there for 100s if not thousands of years; and his parents were still there. One day Chepe got a bad cold, and that night at dinner one of the other priests said, "Chepe's mother will be here tomorrow with all her herbs and medicines." I didn't think this was so remarkable in itself until I realized that in Chepe's home village there was no phone.   
So I asked "Did someone go to Chepe's village and tell his mother that he was sick?" They all responded by laughing. One of them said, "No one has to tell her when one of her children is ill; she knows."

Sure enough the next day there was Chepe's mother at the door with her bag of remedies. She stayed for several days, sleeping on the floor of Chepe's room until he was well." I'm not sure I would have believed it if I hadn't of seen it for myself, and to this day I still do not understand how it happened. It was an experience that showed how powerful our connection to one another can be.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the feast of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three divine persons in one being.

The Trinity is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Church yet it remains beyond the understanding, not just of we ordinary folk, but of the greatest minds in the history of the church.

According to the theologians of the Easter Orthodox Church our inability to fully comprehend the trinity is rather a good thing. They say that because the Trinity defies rational explanation that it somehow holds us in mystery and prevents us from becoming too intellectual or heady in our approach to the divine. And this is the reason that the Trinity is so revered in the orthodox churches.

Gregory of Nanzianzus, one of the greatest orthodox theologians of the 4th century used to go into a sort of trance, weeping uncontrollably when he meditated on the Trinity. He wrote:

"No sooner do I conceive of the One that I am illumined by the splendor of the three, no sooner do I distinguish the three than I am carried back into the One. When I think of any of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me."

Karen Armstrong, who some of you may know wrote that the trinity was, for the Fathers and Mothers of the Eastern Church, not a logical formulation, but an imaginative paradigm that confounded reason. Thinking about the Trinity brought, not intellectual insight but a mental confusion allowing one to enter into a deeper experience of the divine.

Maybe all of this is an excuse to skip the sermon today altogether and just move on to the creed, or at the very least it gives me a good defense if I fail to make any sense whatsoever.

But I don't think Gregory and his confreres were suggesting that we shouldn't reflect on the Trinity, but that we shouldn't be looking for a rational understanding. This is not science or philosophy, it is mystery. The concept of the Trinity is designed to move us out of our heads into our hearts, and to a more profound experience of faith and life.

The Trinity is not a thing like the things which we are familiar, God is not a person like the person sitting next to you. The Trinity is not static, but is a dynamic relationship. This may be one of the reasons we have such a hard time with the doctrine of the Trinity, because we have a hard time not conceiving God as a thing, even a thing with a capital letter. As a culture dominated by science, by the world of facts, it is difficult for us to truly understand the power of myth and metaphor. And without the ability to access myth and metaphor religion quickly stops making sense.

The teachings of Jesus suggest that God does not exist in time and space, that God is pure relationship. This is what the concept of the Trinity seems to suggest, a kind of circular movement in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit move from, through, into and out of one another in a way that generates and creates a love that overflows and brings the world into being. It is a love that has no limits and *we* are invited to be a part of it. Jesus says in the Gospel of John: I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one--as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

Is anyone feeling woozy yet. I think I am starting to.

Do we really believe that the Love generated by the Trinity, the love that we are told came into the world in the person of Jesus, that love that is the nature of the divine really exists in the world as a real energy, an energy that can connect us the way Chepe's mother was connected to her children. What we believe about this question will determine the way we approach God and the way we approach life.

The Trinity is not just a way to think about God, it is a way to think about everything. The spiritual teacher and writer Cynthia Bourgeault says it this way: "Everything is breathing and receiving and giving back from everything else at all levels of being, fundamentally this is the dance--it is the only language in which God can speak the word love."

That we are a part of the divine exchange, a constant giving and receiving, may seem exhausting, but it shouldn't seem strange to us. Because this exchange doesn't just happen on the spiritual plane. Every second of every day, whether we are awake or asleep we are experiencing the exchange of gases in our very blood as oxygen constantly replaces carbon dioxide. Life in all its forms is a process of exchange, when the exchange stops life ceases.

But what does seeing ourselves as part of the divine exchange mean in our day to day lives? Does it have any practical results? Well, it can help us avoid becoming stuck in unhealthy patterns or habits, it can move us beyond our fixations with the little annoyances of life, it can free us from our fears, and it can help us enter into the unknown with courage and hope. It can provide a way to live richer spiritual lives. And it promises a way to become part of the divine generation of love and compassion, part of the transmission of love's power into the world.

God does not dole out grace in bits and pieces. Divine love is not a reward for being good. It is not withheld as a punishment for sinful behaviour. Love is like sound waves or light or gravity, it is always there. It is the spirt that Jesus says blows where it will, like the wind. It is available always and everywhere, we only have to be open, and by being open enter into the divine exchange; an exchange not based on trading things of value, not an exchange based on fairness and equity, not an exchange in which everything is weighed and measured, but an exchange that is more like an overflowing, one that fills us and connects us. This too is reflected in our world that is overflowing with an abundance of everything we need.

I think of the poem by the Sufi poet Hafiz:

# “Even After All this time The Sun never says to the Earth, "You owe me." Look What happens With a love like that, It lights the whole sky.”

# So, being practical, how do we open ourselves to divine love? How do we enter into the divine exchange and connect as Jesus says like a branch is connected to the vine. We know how: by practicing listening, letting go, meditating on the Scriptures; by seeing the opportunities to put others first, making little sacrifices in our lives, by practicing gratitude and appreciation, and by trusting in the power of divine love.

We are given an endless array of opportunities to join what Cynthia Bourgeault calls the divine dance. We might even try meditating on the Trinity, like Gregory of Nanzianzus, although this should always be done sitting down, and never while driving a car.