Today is Trinity Sunday. It is the only feast day on the church calendar that does not celebrate a person or an event, but rather a doctrine. It is a day that is given to celebrating and contemplating the Holy Trinity, one of the oldest and most widely accepted of all Christian beliefs and, if you don't mind my saying so, one of the least understood. I don't understand it either. But I have, over the years, done some reading on the subject.

Some wisdom illustrative garnered over the years and here are some recent ones: Our eyes are two distinct "persons", in that they stand distinctly on their own, right? But they are one in will and essence as they produce a single image when we use them to see with.

Or, Think of a C-chord. The C, E, and G notes are all distinct notes, but joined together as one chord, the sound is richer and more dynamic than if the notes had been played individually. The notes are all equally important in producing the rich sound, and the sound is lacking and thin if one of the notes is left out.

There is no mention of the Trinity or a Trinity in the Bible. The three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are mentioned together only once, and that in the nineteenth verse of chapter 28 of Matthew's gospel. *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

The doctrine of the Trinity as we know it was formulated in about 400 AD, under the leadership of Saint Basil of Caesarea, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, known as the Cappadocian Fathers. A vague belief or quasi-doctrinal version of God as three-in-one had been floating around since the early church was first formed, but it was under those three that it took, pretty much, the form it has today and that form is accepted in all of the historic confessions of Christianity.

Most of us grew up with it as an unquestioned, if little understood, part of our Christian upbringing. We stood and sang the doxology, bearing down on that last line: "Glory be To The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

If we had questions about that mysterious formulation, we usually swallowed them for fear that, as was often the case, when you ask preachers a theological question, they tell you "how the watch works" when you really just wanted to know "what time it is."

So, I waded through the doxology and listened to my Vicar talk about the Trinity, never really understanding or even trying to understand what we were singing and talking about. I had no problem with the first part, the Father. I had always suspected that God was like a father; not just any father, you understand, but sort of a perfect father like the fictional Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* or the real life author JRR Tolkien.

God, the Father was like those blokes — kind, patient, understanding, and forgiving. And if he occasionally got it wrong, like in the proposed sacrifice of Isaac, he admitted it and corrected the situation immediately. That's what really good Fathers do, right? And, if you spend enough time with your father, you can actually develop a relationship with him. Even the quiet, introspective, recalcitrant kinds of fathers can be warmed up if we work hard at it.

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The son part of the Trinity was no more difficult to work out than the Father part. The Son is Jesus and where do we find Jesus? Why, in the gospels, of course. You want to know the second person of the Trinity, read the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and then read the spiritual gospel, John. That will give you a pretty good understanding of just who Jesus was. If you are willing to spend the time and energy, you can develop a close, personal relationship with him.

But the Holy Spirit was and is a hard concept for me to get my mind around. Not to put too fine a point on it, it has been a raspberry seed in the gap of my front teeth for most of my thinking and reasoning life. So, how shall we speak of this Holy Spirit?

Let us speak first of spirits in general, those of the not-so-holy kind. The spirits we speak of and accept as not just harmless but benevolent, even good on a near daily basis — spirit in the common, everyday sense.

The Cambridge Dictionary tells us that spirit is a particular way of thinking, feeling, or behaving, especially a way that is typical of a particular group of people, an activity, a time, or a place. The spirit of Australia, say. If you have it, you have a particular way of behaving, of talking, and of approaching life. You enjoy certain things and avoid others. You probably enjoy a barbie or Lamingtons.

Or, for example, there's the spirit of adventure. If you have it, you enjoy risks and the exploration of new and novel things. You go on safaris, you climb mountains, you try things just to see if you can do them.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers this among several definitions of spirit: an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms. That's close to what we're talking about, here. Spirit is the reliquary of a thing's essence. Spirit is the part of every person and every human system that holds its meaning and purpose and the gives it authentic life. A used car salesman might say, "In the spirit of full disclosure, I must tell you that this car you are about to buy has been wrecked, twice." It is that spirit that motivates and enlivens the salesman's ethical approach to his customers. A priest might say, "Let us enter into a spirit of prayer or worship," for, indeed, prayer and worship are those things that give a Christian fellowship its meaning and purpose. The spirit of Christmas gives life to the Christmas season. School spirit gives life to the student body. The spirit of the law gives life to the law that would otherwise just be cold, unfeeling, wooden words. If we can accept that a spirit is that animating and the vital principle that gives life to not just organisms, but to systems as well, then let us speak now of a certain kind of spirit that gives a certain kind of authentic life to Christian persons and the system that is called the Church.

Because we believe that this spirit comes from God, as a gift to us, we who are motivated and enlivened by it refer to it as holy. It is the Holy Spirit which gives authentic life and vitality to Christian life, individually, and corporately as the Church. Listen to how Paul closed his second letter to the church in Corinth: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.* The "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" is that fellowship that is given life and authenticity by God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is that spirit which enlivens, strengthens, legitimises, and animates our fellowship as Christians and it is in that fellowship, the Church, that we realise its presence in our lives most keenly. And it is by that presence that we receive in fellowship that we are strengthened for our individual journeys.

God is made known to us as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. In each of these aspects we can

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come to know the essence of God and in all three, together, we come to know the fullness of God. But it is through the Holy Spirit that we know God as motivator, animator, and authenticator. It is in God that we discover the strength that we need to make the journey of an authentic life…..I will end this reflection with on quick story:

There was a young missionary, Father Paul, who lived and worked with a couple of other missionaries, Father Michael and Brother Bartholomew, in a mountainous region of a South American country. They ran a medical clinic for the native peoples whom they loved and who loved them in return.

One day they ran out of one of the drugs that was necessary for the running of their clinic and so they sent Father Paul down the mountain to the city to purchase some more. They also sent two young native men to go with him as guides since the mountainside was crisscrossed with many hundreds of goat tracks and paths that, to a novice, might all look the same and it would be easy to take the wrong one and get lost.

The three young men, Father Paul and his two guides, made their way down the mountain to the city and the young missionary purchased the necessary drugs and was ready to return up the mountain to the clinic, but his guides were nowhere to be found.

Apparently, they had become fascinated with the allure of the city and decided to explore it. Father Paul could not wait, however. Lives were at stake and the medicine he had purchased was urgently needed. So, he decided to start back up the mountain without his guides.

It was starting to get dark early, as it does in the mountains, and, as you might expect, Father Paul was soon, hopelessly lost. Eventually, it became dark and he found a small stream with potable water and slept through the night, there. The next morning, he started walking, again, but he could not find the path to the village. Again, he had to sleep on the mountain.

The next morning, he awoke to the sound of people laughing and talking, walked up a path, climbed a small rise and there was his village. Father Michael and Brother Bartholomew ran to him and welcomed him home, patting him on the back, relieved that he was well.

He related the story of how his guides had disappeared and the two young men were appropriately chastised by the head-man of the village but everyone wanted to know how he had made it back without guides.

“I prayed,” he said. “Yes, of course,” Father Michael said. “You prayed and the Holy Spirit came to you and showed you which path to take. It was a miracle…” But before he could finish his thought, Father Paul interrupted him. “No, Father, God did answer my prayer, but the Holy Spirit did not show me which path to take. The Spirit gave me the strength to keep trying different paths until I found the one that led me here.”

Finally something profound for you to go away with- think on this - One activity of God’s Holy Spirit, maybe the main activity, the primary one, is in giving us the strength we need to make the journey we need to make to get us to where God wants us to be.

Fr Robert Newton

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