

From Fr. Mark

Friday, February 14 on the secular calendar is listed as St. Valentine's Day. The Roman Catholic Church no longer lists Saint Valentine's Day on its official calendar, instead, if you come to church that day, you will hear prayers concerning Saints Cyril and Methodius. Interesting enough, the Anglican and Lutheran churches do list St. Valentine's Day and the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates Saint Valentine's Day, but in July. There are several Saint Valentines associated with February 14, but it seems the tradition revolves largely around Valentine of Rome.

Valentine of Rome is said to be a Christian martyr, killed on February 14, 496 under the direction of Emperor Claudius II of Rome. Several stories about his persecution exist. One is that during general persecution of Christians, Valentine of Rome was interviewed personally by Emperor Claudius II for sentencing. Evidently Claudius II was impressed by Valentine and offered that if Valentine converted to paganism his life could be spared. Rather than convert, Valentine is said to have attempted to convert Claudius to Christianity, thus earning himself the death penalty. Prior to his execution, Valentine is thought to have performed a healing miracle for the jailer's blind daughter, Julia. In some renditions, Valentine wrote a letter to Julia prior to his execution, signed "Your Valentine."

Another tradition suggests that Valentine performed weddings for soldiers who had been prohibited from marrying by rule of Emperor Claudius II based on the belief that single men make better soldiers. Valentine was jailed and supposedly those whom he had married passed him notes and flowers in jail. Also while in jail he fell in love with the jailer's daughter. Prior to his execution he is said to have written her a love letter signed, "Your Valentine."

There is also a tradition that Valentine gave hearts made of parchment to soldiers and persecuted Christians reminding them of their vows as well as God's love. Some have linked Valentine's Day to a celebration of the beginning of spring. Others have suggested that Valentine's Day has pagan roots and is associated with Lupercalia, a February pagan holiday centered on fertility and love. Others say that the connection between Valentine's Day and romance did not come about until the 14th Century with the English poet Chaucer's writings.

It seems the modern celebration of Valentine's Day as a romantic holiday that includes exchanging of cards, chocolates, and flowers came largely out of England and developed fairly recently. Commercialized Valentine's cards came about in the early to mid-nineteenth century. In the latter portion of the twentieth century, giving gifts became popular. The celebration of Valentine's Day has extended from England to the Anglosphere and beyond.

Valentine's traditions, and even the date of celebration, vary depending upon the country. Many countries include the traditions of exchanging cards, candies, flowers, or other gifts with loved ones. In some countries Valentine's Day is largely a celebration of friendship whereas in other countries it is a celebration of romantic love. Attitudes toward Valentine's Day also vary. Some in Western countries view Valentine's Day as largely a holiday for the profit of greeting card companies, chocolate factories, and flower shops. Some couples treat Valentine's Day as a particularly important day to express their love for one another, whereas for others it is just another day. For some single persons wishing to be married, Valentine's Day is viewed as a hurtful reminder of their undesired relationship status. For others, both single and married, Valentine's is simply a day to express love to all manner of friends and family.