

A Priest's Legacy

Today is a day for lovers. It says so on the calendar: February 14, Valentine's Day. But how did this date come to be known for love, and who is the man for whom it is named?

Recognized as a saint by the Catholic church, Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men – his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of his decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death. Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed while attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured. That scenario, too, would have been a powerful demonstration of love.

According to one legend, Valentine actually sent the first "valentine" greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl – who may have been the jailer's daughter – who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed, "From your Valentine," an expression that is still in use today.

Today, romantic love, it seems, has taken Valentine's Day hostage. That's not a bad thing; in fact, it's a good thing. But there are other kinds of love – filial (or love for family) and agape (love of God), which is the highest and purest expression of love – the kind that Jesus showed when He went to the cross for the sake of mankind. So while I certainly encourage an outpouring of romantic love through various creative means today (and I had better do so, for Lola is reading this, too), it is recommended that expressions of these other forms of love also be shown, such as:

- ♥ Writing a note to a family member (parent, sibling, grandparent, uncle or aunt) to tell that person how much he or she has meant to you.
- ♥ Stopping by the room of a resident in a nursing, assisted living or retirement center to hug someone and spend a few moments in conversation.
- ♥ Placing a telephone call to a former teacher, schoolmate or mentor to express appreciation for how that individual has influenced your life.
- ♥ Helping an associate accomplish a difficult task during a busy day.

In these ways, celebration of Valentine's Day becomes even more meaningful.

--Beecher Hunter