

St. Valentine



Saint Valentine, officially known as Saint Valentine of Rome, is a third-century Roman saint widely celebrated on February 14 and commonly associated with "courtly love." Although not much of St. Valentine's life is reliably known, and whether or not the stories involve two different saints by the same name is also not officially decided, it is highly agreed that St. Valentine was martyred and then buried on the Via Flaminia to the north of Rome.

In 1969, the Roman Catholic Church removed St. Valentine from the General Roman Calendar, because so little is known about him. However, the church still recognizes him as a saint, listing him in the February 14 spot of Roman Martyrology. The legends attributed to the mysterious saint are as inconsistent as the actual identification of the man.

One common story about St. Valentine is that in one point of his life, as the former Bishop of Terni, Narnia and Amelia, he was on house arrest with Judge Asterius. While discussing religion and faith with the Judge, Valentine pledged the validity of Jesus. The judge immediately put Valentine and his faith to the test.

St. Valentine was presented with the judge's blind daughter and told to restore her sight. If he succeeded, the judge vowed to do anything for Valentine. Placing his hands onto her eyes, Valentine restored the child's vision. Judge Asterius was humbled and obeyed Valentine's requests. Asterius broke all the idols around his house, fasted for three days and became baptized, along with his family and entire 44 member household. The now faithful judge then freed all of his Christian inmates.

St. Valentine was later arrested again for continuing to try to convert people to Christianity. He was sent to Rome under the emperor Claudius Gothicus (Claudius II). According to the popular hagiographical identity, and what is believed to be the first representation of St. Valentine, the Nuremberg Chronicle, St. Valentine was a Roman priest martyred during

Claudius' reign. The story tells that St. Valentine was imprisoned for marrying Christian couples and aiding Christians being persecuted by Claudius in Rome. Both acts were considered serious crimes. A relationship between the saint and emperor began to grow, until Valentine attempted to convince Claudius of Christianity. Claudius became enraged and sentenced Valentine to death, commanding him to renounce his faith or be beaten with clubs and beheaded.

St. Valentine refused to renounce his faith and Christianity and was executed outside the Flaminian Gate on February 14, 269. However, other tales of St. Valentine's life claim he was executed either in the year 269, 270, 273 or 280. Other depictions of St. Valentine's arrests tell that he secretly married couples so husbands wouldn't have to go to war. Another variation of the legend of St. Valentine says he refused to sacrifice to pagan gods, was imprisoned and while imprisoned he healed the jailer's blind daughter. On the day of his execution, he left the girl a note signed, "Your Valentine."

Pope Julius I is said to have built a church near Ponte Mole in his memory, which for a long time gave name to the gate now called Porta del Popolo, formerly, Porta Valetini.

The romantic nature of Valentine's Day may have derived during the Middle Ages, when it was believed that birds paired couples in mid-February. According to English 18th-century antiquarians Alban Butler and Francis Douce, Valentine's Day was most likely created to overpower the pagan holiday, Lupercalia. Although the exact origin of the holiday is not widely agreed upon, it is widely recognized as a day for love, devotion and romance.

Whoever he was, Valentine did really exist, because archaeologists have unearthed a Roman catacomb and an ancient church dedicated to St. Valentine. In 496 AD Pope Gelasius marked February 14th as a celebration in honor of his martyrdom. Relics of St. Valentine can be found all over the world. A flower-crowned skull of St. Valentine can be found in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, Rome. In 1836, other relics were exhumed from the catacombs of Saint Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina and were identified as Valentine's. These were transported for a special Mass dedicated to those young and in love.

Fr. John Spratt received a gift from Pope Gregory XVI in 1836 containing a "small vessel tinged" with St. Valentine's blood. This gift now stands placed in Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin, Ireland. Other alleged relics were found in Prague in the Church of St Peter and Paul at Vysehrad; in the parish church of St. Mary's Assumption in Chelmno Poland; at the reliquary of Roquemaure in France; in the Stephansdom in Vienna; in Balzan in Malta and also in Blessed John Duns Scotus' church in the Gorbals area of Glasgow, Scotland.

St. Valentine is the Patron Saint of affianced couples, bee keepers, engaged couples, epilepsy, fainting, greetings, happy marriages, love, lovers, plague, travellers, and young people. He is represented in pictures with birds and roses and his feast day is celebrated on February 14.