



St. Valentine's Day

If you walk into a greeting card shop you usually are reminded of what season is being celebrated just by looking at the colors of the cards on display. Christmas has red and green spread out everywhere. Easter has yellow, purple and white. Halloween has orange and black. If you walk into a card shop anytime this week, you most likely will see red everywhere. February 14 is St. Valentine's Day, the day we traditionally express our love in special ways for those people we feel close to. We love with our hearts and red is the color that reminds us of a loving heart. Even though St. Valentine is no longer on the church calendar, we can still take time to think about this most interesting saint.

The Vatican's encyclopedia of saints lists sixteen men with the name of Valentine. We do not know too much about most of them. One is reported to be a priest in Rome condemned to death and beheaded. He is believed to be buried on the Via Flaminia where a church was later built. However, due to the confusion resulting from a mistranslation of a document about the church, which was built by a man named Valentine, scholars are not sure he ever existed. Another Valentine in Italy was also martyred and was thought to have been a bishop. He is buried beneath the basilica which bears his name in Terni.

Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm. did research on St. Valentine and says the following of a celebration of St. Valentine's Day in Ireland: "One of the most unusual celebrations takes place each year in the Carmelite Church on Whitefriars Street near the center of Dublin. The remains of this St. Valentine rest in a gold-bound reliquary in the church. How did a Roman martyr get to an Irish church? The journey is explained by the engraved citation on the reliquary.

The remains of St. Valentine were sent to the Carmelite church in 1836 as a gift from Pope Gregory XVI in recognition of the work of a saintly Carmelite priest, Fr. John Spratt, who was prior of the monastery there. He was renowned in Dublin and throughout much of Ireland for his work among the poor, the sick and the outcasts of society. Pope Gregory had the remains of St. Valentine taken from the cemetery of St. Hippolytus on Rome's Triburtine Way, encased on a gold reliquary and then sent to Dublin. In 1836 the remains were enshrined at Whitefriars Street Church with special ceremonies.

When February 14th arrives each year in Dublin, the remains of St. Valentine are carried in a solemn procession to the church's high altar for a special Mass with many young people in attendance. St. Valentine's Day cards are available both before and after the Mass. This Mass is popular with people in love, both young and old. Engaged couples frequently attend the Mass to ask St. Valentine to bless their love. Whichever of the St. Valentine's it is, people use the feast to express their love for each other. And that is not such a bad idea at all!"

Father David