



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

9-2000

8433 Bailey Road \* Darien, Illinois 60561 \* 630-969-4141

### Life is Worth Giving

St. Valentine's Day is for Christian Lovers

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

One of the more joyous feasts<sup>(-)</sup>days in the Christian calendar, especially in the depths of winter, is St. Valentine's Day, Feb. 14. In honor of this early Christian martyr, millions of cards and gifts are offered in the name of love. But, unfortunately, the connection between the saint and his feast-day is greatly diminished today.

Part of the difficulty that influences Christians today is the fact that the Roman Martyrology (the roll call of early martyrs) lists <sup>(-)</sup>no fewer than ten persons who bear the name of St. Valentine and gave their lives in testimony to their Faith.

Although it is not certain who the "real" St. Valentine was, one of the ten, imprisoned during the reign of <sup>(-)</sup>Roman Emperor Claudius II in the Third Century, A.D., is thought to have inspired the feasts<sup>(-)</sup>day we celebrate in our day.

An ancient account of St. Valentine's life relates that he was an energetic and much-loved priest who cared for his Christian people during the persecutions which occurred during the cruel reign of Emperor Claudius.

-more-

Fr. Kevin/ LIFE (St. Valentine)/ 2

At the time the Roman Empire was being bes<sup>ie</sup>ged on many of its far-flung borders, and the emperor needed soldiers for his many battles. Due to reluctance of the soldiers to leave their wives and sweethearts, the emperor placed a ban on all engagements and marriages.

Since St. Valentine regarded marriage as a Christian sacrament, he decid<sup>e</sup>d that the law was both unjust and unnatural and continued to marry couples in secret.

When Emperor Claudius heard of this, he threw St. Valentine into prison where he eventually died as a "martyr" to love and marriage.

Still another legend relates that St. Valentine, while in prison, had a deep affection for the blind daughter of the jailer. It is said that he performed a miracle which cured the blindness of the young girl and allowed her to see the beauty and love which abounded in the world.

When he heard of the miracle, Emperor Claudius was angry and ordered that St. Valentine be beheaded. ~~But~~ But before being led to his execution on Feb. 14, 269 A.D., sent a letter to the jailer's daughter and signed it simply, "From Your Valentine."

Thus the tradition of sending a "valentine" to one's beloved on Feb. 14 began. The day itself was set aside to honor St. Valentine by Pope Gelasius in the Fifth Century and is still observed greatly to the present time.

Fr. Kevin/ LIFE (St. Valentine)/ 3

Not without reason, St. Valentine soon became the patron saint of lovers throughout the Christian world. During the Middle Ages in Europe, amorous youths met on St. Valentine's Eve to pick valentines. A young man drew a maiden's name, wore it on his sleeve ("wearing your heart on your sleeve"), and protected and attended to her for the following year. This would include gifts, especially of flowers, plus poems and other tokens of love.

One of the earliest "valentine" writers was a young ~~Frenchman~~ Frenchman, Charles, Duke of Orleans who was taken prison by the English at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. While confined in the Tower of London for several years, he wrote many "poetical or amorous addresses" to his wife in France.

Today in Whitefriars Church in Dublin, where the relics of St. Valentine are venerated, young and old couples gather for the "Mass of Lovers" each Feb. 14th in the hope that their love will be blessed forever.

In this age when marriage, family life and love itself are under attack, it may be good to remember an early Christian martyr, St. Valentine, whose name is synomous with all three.

(FR. KEVIN SHAWLEY, O.C.A.R.M., IS A STAFF MEMBER AT THE CARMELITE SPIRITUAL CENTER IN -30- DARIEN, IL 60561.