



Carmelite Spiritual Center

21
2003

8433 Bailey Road * Darien, Illinois 60561 * 630-969-4141
Life is Worth Giving

Sept. 14, 2002

ST. VALENTINE RESTS LOVINGLY IN DUBLIN CHURCH

by Fr. Kevin [REDACTED] Shanley, O.Carm.

When Feb. 14th rolls around each year on the calendar, literally millions of people in many parts of the world scurry to purchase Valentine cards to profess their love for special people in their lives. St. Valentine, a Roman priest and martyr who died at the end of the Third Century, is usually credited with this custom of expressing affection for one's beloved. However, its origins seem to go back further to the Roman goddess Juno, the queen of heaven and protectress of women and marriage. Expressions of love and affection, especially towards wives and mothers, were made in honor of Juno and her feastday.

According to Christian sources, St. Valentine, who was thought to be a doctor who cared for the sick in a loving and curing manner, began the custom when he was imprisoned by the pagan Romans for being a Christian. It is said that he tried to keep in touch with family and friends during his imprisonment by sending notes of consolation. These he signed, "From your Valentine." The notes often contained expressions of love and gratitude.

-more-

Fr. Kevin/ ST. VALENTINE/ 2

Still others claim that the custom of sending St. Valentine's Day greetings dates back to the medieval notion that birds began their mating season at this time, and thus the day was considered auspicious for human lovers, too.

Whatever the origins, St. Valentine's Day is celebrated by lovers in many parts of the world, and has some very unusual Irish connections, too. This may seem quite fitting since the Irish are considered great lovers of God, people, and their island home.

The Irish Connection

Few are aware that, although he died in Rome many centuries ago, St. Valentine actually rests in a small, gold-bound casket in Dublin's Whitefriar Street Church, near the top of George Street, not far from St. Stephen's Green.

But how did a Roman martyr get to a Dublin church? The journey is explained by the engraved citation on the casket itself. The remains of St. Valentine were sent to the Carmelite church in 1836 as a gift from Pope Gregory XVI in grateful recognition of the work of a saintly Carmelite priest, Fr. John Spratt, O.Carm., who was the prior of the monastery attached to the church. He was renowned in Dublin and much of Ireland for his work among the poor, the sick, and anyone else who came to him for help. He not only gave away for own food, clothing and funds to the poor, but also whatever he could beg from others.

Fr. Kevin/ ST. VALENTINE/ 3

To the many poor who inhabited the slums of Dublin in those days, Fr. Spratt was a man who loved and cared for them. His memory lives on in Whitefriars Church today where the poor are still fed and cared for by the Carmelites. And the memory of St. Valentine lives on there to this day.

Each Feb. 14th, the Carmelites hold a solemn procession in honor of St. Valentine's Day, followed by a special "Young Peoples' Mass" in his memory. Both are more than popular with the young people of Ireland, especially engaged couples who ask the saint to bless their love for each other. And lovers of all ages attend, too. Authentic St. Valentine's cards are also available at the church.

Who was St. Valentine?

Although there is some recent controversy about the saint who has been called "the Cupid of Christianity," tradition tells us that St. Valentine was a priest in the 3rd Century Roman Empire. When the then Emperor Claudius II forbade young men of military age to marry, thinking that single men made better soldiers for the Empire's defense, St. Valentine defied the edict and performed secret marriages.

When Emperor Claudius discovered this, he ordered St. Valentine arrested and sentenced to death. While in prison awaiting execution, he is said to have restored the sight of a young girl, the daughter of the Roman judge who had tried his case.

Fr. Kevin/ ST. VALENTINE/ 4

Tradition tells us that before being beaten and beheaded for his "crimes," on Feb. 14, 296, St. Valentine wrote a ^(fond) farewell note to the young girl he cured of blindness. The note was signed "From your Valentine."

Following his execution, according to another tradition, a pink almond tree blossomed at his grave, and thus became a symbol of ^(enduring) ~~enduring~~ love.

By the 4th Century A.D., when Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, a large church was built near the burial place of St. Valentine and named in his honor. It soon became a popular pilgrimage place for those who visited the Eternal City. And in 498 A.D., Pope Gelasius named Feb. 14th as St. Valentine's Day. The crocus that blooms at this time soon became known as St. Valentine's flower.

A pre-Christian tradition also links the observance with the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia. Young Roman girls observed the festival by fashioning decorative message of love which they placed in an urn. According to the custom, the young men who drew out the messages would court the young maiden whose name he'd chosen.

Whatever the origin of the traditions, both pagan and Christian, they have served to keep alive the memory of St. Valentine for some 17 centuries as a great tribute to both Christian and human love.