

The Love of the Holy Martyr Valentine
By Fr. Theophan Buck

This coming Sunday is Valentine's Day that started as a remembrance of a Christian martyr of the 3rd century. Much like Christmas, Valentine's day has been commercialized and reduced to a celebration of romantic love manifested by giving cards, candy, and flowers to our loved ones.

There is nothing wrong with romantic love and gift-giving, however, the love that Christians are called to is more than mere romantic feelings. In the Scriptures, we are told by Jesus that "Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). For Christians, to love is to sacrifice ourselves, to be willing to lay down our lives for others. If we follow Jesus's teaching and example, we are also willing to love and lay down our lives for our enemies.

Here is a summary of St. Valentine's life I found online which illustrates Christian love.

Saint Valentine lived in Rome in the third century and was a priest who helped the martyrs during the persecution of Emperor Claudius II the Goth. The great virtue and catechetical activities of the Saint had become known. For this, he was arrested and brought before the imperial court. "Why, Valentine, do you want to be a friend of our enemies and reject our friendship?" asked the Emperor. The Saint replied: "My lord if you knew the gift of God, you would be happy together with your empire and would reject the worship of idols and worship the true God and His Son Jesus Christ." One of the judges stopped the Saint and asked him what he thought about Jupiter and Mercury, and Valentine boldly replied: "They are miserable, and spent their lives in corruption and crime!" The judge furiously shouted: "He blasphemes against the gods and the empire!" The Emperor, however, continued his questions with curiosity and found a welcome opportunity to finally learn what was the faith of Christians. Valentine then found the courage to urge him to repent for the blood of the Christians that was shed. "Believe in Jesus Christ, be baptized and you will be saved, and from this time forward the glory of your empire will be ensured as well as the triumph of your armory." Claudius became convinced, and said to those who were present: "What a beautiful teaching this man preaches." But the Mayor of Rome, dissatisfied, began to shout: "See how this Christian misled our Prince." Then Claudius brought the Saint to another judge. He was called Asterios, and he had a little girl who was blind for two years. Listening about Jesus Christ, that He is the Light of the World, he asked Valentine if he could give that light to his child. St. Valentine put his hand on her eyes and prayed: "Lord Jesus Christ, true Light, illuminate this blind child." Oh, the great miracle! The child could see! So the judge with all his family confessed Christ. Having fasted for three days, he destroyed the idols that were in the house and finally received Holy Baptism. When the Emperor heard about all these events, he initially thought not to punish them, thinking that in the eyes of the citizens he will look weak, which forced him to betray his sense of justice. Therefore St. Valentine along with other Christians, after they were tortured, were beheaded on 14 February in the year 268 (or 269).

Notice, St. Valentine was persecuted for his faith, and yet, by the grace of God, his main concern seemed to be the healing and salvation of his enemies. He preached the Gospel with words and deeds. He loved Christ so much that he was willing to be tortured and die for Him.

May Christ our God grant us the strength in our troubled times to preach the Gospel with words and deeds and be willing to lay down our lives for the healing and salvation of our friends and even our enemies.