

The Story of St. Valentine

by Phyllis Meshel Onest

Like other days of celebration within our culture, Valentine's Day has its origins in pagan times. In ancient Rome this feast day was known as Lupercalia, the "feast of Lupercus."

Lupercus was the Roman god that protected them from wolves, which were a great danger in that area. The wolves, which lived in the woods that covered most of the land, would carry off the farmers' sheep and goats. Sometimes the farmers and their families were not even safe!

Each year in the middle of February the Romans honored the god Lupercus, giving him thanks for protecting them from the wolves. The people feasted, danced and played games. When the young men wanted partners for the dancing and games, they drew names of girls from a bowl. Sometimes they became sweethearts, too. This went on for hundreds of years.

When Christianity came to Rome, the Christian Romans put aside their belief in Lupercus, but because Lupercalia was a happy time, and they did not want to give it up, the feast of Lupercalia was replaced with the feast of St. Valentine.

What is the story behind St. Valentine?

Although Christianity had come to Rome, it was not accepted by the Roman Emperor Claudius II, who considered himself a god. Many times people were arrested and even killed for believing in Jesus instead of the Emperor.

One year a young couple, Julius and Octavia, loved each other very much and wanted to get married. Since Julius was a soldier, and soldiers in that city were not allowed to get married, they decided to get married secretly. They went to a very kind priest who lived outside the city, Fr. Valentine.

When Julius and Octavia arrived at Fr. Valentine's home, they found a beautiful flower garden. Fr. Valentine was surrounded by little children who were helping him with his plants and flowers. As the children left, Fr. Valentine gave each of them a bouquet of flowers to take with them.

Some time later Fr. Valentine married Julius and Octavia, who were very happy to be married by a Christian priest. They knew God would be pleased with them.

One day the children went to the garden to visit with Fr. Valentine. When they arrived they found the flowers trampled and the house empty. Fr. Valentine had been taken away to the jail because he believed that Jesus was God. Fr. Valentine was not afraid. He trusted in God to help him.

The children decided to care for Fr. Valentine's garden. They knew that would make him happy. Every day some of the children would take him flowers from his garden. The jailor's blind daughter took the flowers into the jail and gave them to Fr. Valentine.

The jailor's daughter was very kind to Fr. Valentine. Before Fr. Valentine was put to death for

believing in God, he prayed to Jesus asking Him to heal the jailor's daughter of her blindness. She was healed! Before Fr. Valentine died, he wrote her a good-bye letter and signed it "From Your Valentine."

Ever since then, February 14, the day Fr. Valentine died, became a day of celebrating. We remember that he was very kind and that he believed in God. We remember that he loved God so much that he was willing to die for Him. When we give and receive gifts, flowers and cards on St. Valentine's day we remember the kindness Fr. Valentine showed to the people he loved, and show our love for others.

A St. Valentine's Bible Activity

Read each of the Bible verses to discover what God tells us to love.

- Psalm 119:140 (God's Word)
- Psalm 119:113 (God's Law)
- Amos 5:15 (Good)
- Zechariah 8:19 (Truth; Peace)
- Deuteronomy 10:19 (Strangers)
- John 15:12 (One Another)
- Romans 13:9 (Your neighbor)
- Luke 6:27 (Your enemies)
- 1 John 4:21 (Your brothers & sisters)
- 1 Peter 2:17 (Other Christians)
- Mark 12:30 (The Lord God)

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