

How did a bachelor priest come to represent a day celebrating romantic love? Despite the cupids and hearts that we see today, Saint Valentine was a real person.

The strongest traditions put Valentine in third century Italy. He was a physician turned priest and fell under the persecution of the pagan Emperor Claudius II. During that era, the Romans tried to encourage young men to delay marriage because it was thought they would fight more intensely as soldiers. Defying the ban, Valentine performed Christian marriage ceremonies. He was imprisoned, and after refusing to renounce his faith, condemned to death. While awaiting his execution, legends seem consistent that he healed the jailer's blind daughter. The jailer came to faith, and was baptized along with his family. Less secure is the idea that, on the day of his execution, he left a note for the healed girl and signed it "your Valentine."

A thousand years later, Chaucer makes note of Valentine in one of his works and, in co-opting the pagan fertility holiday of Lupercalia, we have the beginnings of our modern holiday tradition.

Valentine is a great example of self-sacrifice and unwavering faithfulness; characteristics for us to develop in our spiritual journey. But these traits are also disciplines that will serve us well in our relationships, whether we are single or married. So let's celebrate St. Valentine! And hopefully become a little more like him.

How will you celebrate Valentine's Day?

Is there someone you know that might need a Valentine?

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