

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Valentine

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Valentine

Priest and martyr of Rome in the 3rd century, buried on the Via Flaminia, patron saint of lovers and engaged couples.

Feast day	February 14
Died	3rd century (c. 269 according to tradition), Rome, Via Flaminia
Canonized	pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	lovers, engaged couples, married couples, people with epilepsy

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Valentine

Saint Valentine was a Christian martyr of Rome who died in the 3rd century and was buried on the Via Flaminia, north of the city. His existence and his very ancient cult are well attested, but nearly everything told about his life belongs to legend. His feast day is February 14. His connection with lovers appeared only in the late Middle Ages, more than a thousand years after his death, and he has become the patron saint of engaged and married couples around the world.

Who was Saint Valentine?

With Saint Valentine, it is important to separate what we know from what is told. What we know is simple: a Christian named Valentine was put to death for his faith and buried at the second milestone of the Via Flaminia, near the Milvian Bridge. In the 4th century, Pope Julius I built a basilica over his tomb, and a catacomb grew up around it. The Roman Martyrology still commemorates him on February 14.

The accounts of his martyrdom, called "passions," were written later, probably in the 5th and 6th centuries. They make him a priest of Rome, martyred under Emperor Claudius II Gothicus around 269. The same sources also know a Saint Valentine, bishop of Terni, martyred in Rome and buried on the same Via Flaminia, at Terni. Many historians think these are one and the same martyr, honored in two places.

At the end of the 5th century, Pope Gelasius I already counted Valentine among the saints "whose names are rightly revered among men, but whose deeds are known only to God." That phrase is a good guide for reading the stories that follow.

Key dates

- **3rd century**: Martyrdom in Rome, around 269 under Claudius II according to tradition; burial on the Via Flaminia.
- **4th century**: Pope Julius I (337-352) builds a basilica over his tomb.
- **Late 5th century**: Pope Gelasius I lists him among the martyrs whose deeds are known only to God.
- **Late 14th century**: The English poet Geoffrey Chaucer makes the first known link between Saint Valentine's Day and love.
- **1836**: Pope Gregory XVI gives relics attributed to Saint Valentine to the Carmelite church on Whitefriar Street, Dublin.
- **1969**: The reform of the liturgical calendar removes his memorial from the General Roman Calendar; he remains in the Roman Martyrology.

The priest of the legend

According to the most widespread passion, Valentine was a priest of Rome arrested for helping persecuted Christians. Brought before a magistrate named Asterius, he spoke to him of Christ, the light of the world. Asterius put him to the test and brought him his adopted daughter, who was blind. According to the legend, Valentine prayed, laid his hand on her eyes, and the girl recovered her sight. The whole household then asked for baptism.

Valentine was then brought before the emperor, who ordered him to renounce his faith. He refused and, according to tradition, was beaten and then beheaded on the Via Flaminia on February 14. These accounts follow a pattern common in the passions of Roman martyrs. They pass on above all the early Church's faith in the power of witness, rather than reliable historical details.

Secret weddings and a farewell note: later legends

It is often said that Valentine secretly married soldiers, at a time when Claudius II had forbidden young men to marry so that they would make better soldiers. It is also said that before his death he wrote a letter to his jailer's daughter signed "from your Valentine." Neither story appears in the ancient sources. Both emerged much later and should be regarded as legends.

How Valentine became the saint of lovers

Nothing in the ancient accounts connects Valentine with romantic love. The link appears in England at the end of the 14th century. In his poem "The Parliament of Fowls," Geoffrey Chaucer describes Saint Valentine's Day as the day when every bird comes to choose its mate. The idea spread through courtly poetry in England and France. People began to exchange poems and notes, and in the 19th century printed cards, a custom that grew enormously in Britain and the United States.

It is often claimed that the feast replaced the Lupercalia, a pagan Roman festival held in mid-February. No document proves it, and many historians now reject this explanation. What is certain is that the day of a Roman martyr became, through medieval poetry, the feast of love.

Saint Valentine and the liturgical calendar

In the 1969 calendar reform, the Church removed the memorial of Saint Valentine from the General Roman Calendar, because so little is reliably known about his life. This does not mean that he did not exist or that he is no longer a saint. He remains in the Roman Martyrology on February 14, and his feast may be celebrated freely, especially where his relics are venerated. On February 14, the universal calendar now celebrates Saints Cyril and Methodius, patrons of Europe.

Why is Saint Valentine the patron saint of lovers?

Saint Valentine is the patron saint of lovers, engaged couples and married couples because of the literary tradition that began with Chaucer, not because of any known event in his life. In German-speaking lands he is also invoked against epilepsy, perhaps because his name sounded like the German word "fallen," to fall. He is also prayed to by young people discerning a call to marriage, and by those who hope to meet the right person.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Valentine in art

In older art, Saint Valentine is shown as a priest, sometimes as a bishop, with the martyr's palm and a sword. He is often depicted healing a blind girl or a child with epilepsy lying at his feet. Modern images surround him with hearts, roses and birds.

Where to pray to Saint Valentine

In Dublin, Ireland, the Carmelite Whitefriar Street Church has kept since 1836 relics given by Pope Gregory XVI; many couples come to pray at his shrine on February 14. In Terni, in Umbria, the Basilica of Saint Valentine keeps the relics of the martyr bishop, and the town holds celebrations for couples every February. In Rome, the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin displays a flower-crowned skull attributed to Saint Valentine.

Praying to Saint Valentine

Catholics pray to Saint Valentine for couples, for engaged people, for those looking for love and for those who are suffering in their relationships. Read the prayer to Saint Valentine and pray the novena to Saint Valentine, beginning on February 5.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Valentine for Couples

There is no ancient prayer to Saint Valentine as widespread as those addressed to other saints. The prayer below is an original text by Saintspedia. It draws on what we know of him, a martyr who gave his life for Christ, and on the tradition that made him the patron saint of lovers and couples. It can be prayed alone or together as a couple.

Prayer to Saint Valentine for couples

Saint Valentine, martyr of Christ,
you who chose to give your life rather than deny your Lord,
teach us that to love is to give oneself.

I entrust our love to you (or: the person I love).
Keep it true, patient and faithful.
May it not close in on itself,
but open to others and to God.

Help engaged couples to prepare for marriage with trust,
husbands and wives to forgive each other and say again "I love you,"
those looking for love not to lose heart,
and those who have been hurt to find peace again.

May Christ, who loved to the very end,
be the source of our love and its strength in hard times.

Saint Valentine, pray for us. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

A word from Saint Paul for those who love

> *"Love is patient, love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not boast, it is not puffed up. It is not rude, it does not seek its own interest, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. It does not rejoice in injustice but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*

Source: First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, 13:4-7 (Saintspedia translation). This passage, often read at weddings, is a beautiful text for a couple to read together on Saint Valentine's Day.

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to Saint Valentine at any time, and especially on February 14, his feast day. It is a good occasion for a couple to pray together, to give thanks for their love or to entrust a difficulty to God, perhaps before or after going to Mass. Engaged couples can pray it during their marriage preparation, and single people can pray it to entrust their hope of meeting the right person.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Valentine, from February 5 to 13, and read the life of Saint Valentine.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Valentine

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the witness of Saint Valentine, martyr of Rome, and by the tradition that made him the patron saint of lovers. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on February 5; it ends on February 13, the day before Saint Valentine's Day. It is suited to couples, engaged people, those looking for love and those going through heartbreak, and it can be prayed at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Couples can pray it together, aloud, perhaps in the evening. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. A novena is not a formula that obliges God to answer; it is nine days of perseverance, placing your heart and your relationships in his hands.

Opening prayer for each day

Lord God, you are love itself, and every true love comes from you. You gave Saint Valentine the courage to remain faithful to Christ even to the point of death. As I begin this day of my novena, I place before you my intention (name it in silence), and the people I love. Make our love patient, faithful and generous, heal what is wounded in our hearts, and lead us all closer to you. Saint Valentine, pray for us. Amen.

Day 1: A faithful witness

About Saint Valentine we know one thing above all: he gave his life for Christ. Before he was the saint of lovers, he was a witness of faithfulness to the very end.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust my intention to you for these nine days. Help me to be faithful in small things as well as in great ones.

Today: Write down your intention and place it near a crucifix.

Day 2: God is love

"God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Every true human love has its source in God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to recognize your presence in the love I give and the love I receive.

Today: Thank God by name for three people who love you.

Day 3: Love is patient

Saint Paul begins his hymn to love with patience. To love is to accept the other with their slowness, their faults and their history.

Prayer: Lord, give me patience with those I love, as you are patient with me.

Today: Hold back an irritated remark.

Day 4: Opening our eyes

According to the legend, Valentine restored the sight of a blind girl. Love too opens our eyes: it lets us see the beauty of the other, which habit sometimes hides.

Prayer: Lord, heal my eyes so that I may see others as you see them.

Today: Tell someone close to you a quality you admire in them.

Day 5: Forgiveness

No couple and no family lasts without forgiveness. To forgive does not mean to forget, but to refuse to let evil have the last word.

Prayer: Lord, give me the grace to forgive, and the courage to ask for forgiveness.

Today: Take the first step toward a reconciliation.

Day 6: For those looking for love

Many people suffer from loneliness and long to meet someone. This desire is good. God knows each heart and does not forget it.

Prayer: Saint Valentine, walk with those who are looking for love. Keep them from discouragement and guide their steps.

Today: Pray for someone who is lonely, and reach out to them.

Day 7: For broken hearts

Breakups, divorce, betrayal, bereavement: love can also hurt. Christ does not turn his eyes away from these wounds.

Prayer: Lord, heal hearts wounded by love. Give them peace and hope.

Today: Listen without judging to someone who is hurting in a relationship.

Day 8: For engaged and married couples

Christian marriage is a covenant, an image of God's covenant with his people. To last, it needs the grace of God.

Prayer: Lord, bless engaged couples preparing for marriage, and husbands and wives who renew their "yes" each day.

Today: Pray for a couple you know, or reread together the vows of your wedding.

Day 9: Loving to the end

Valentine loved Christ more than his own life. Jesus says: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Prayer: Saint Valentine, present to God the intention I have entrusted to you. Obtain for me a love that is strong, true and faithful.

Today: Give someone the gift of your time, a letter or a thoughtful gesture for February 14.

Closing prayer

Lord our God, you gave Saint Valentine the strength to bear witness to Christ even to death. Through his prayers, grant what I have asked of you in these nine days, if it is your will. Bless all who love, heal those who suffer in love, and make our love a reflection of your own. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

If you are praying this novena as a couple, you might end the ninth day by thanking each other for one concrete gift you have received from the other this year, and by entrusting your future together to God. If you are praying it alone, remember that your desire to love and be loved is already known and held by God.

Read also the prayer to Saint Valentine and the life of Saint Valentine.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint Valentine in Terni, Tomb of the Saint

The Basilica of Saint Valentine in Terni, in Umbria, in central Italy, preserves the relics of Saint Valentine, bishop of Terni and martyr. It stands on the old route of the Via Flaminia, at the spot where, according to tradition, the saint was buried after his martyrdom. Terni today presents itself as the "city of Saint Valentine" and welcomes couples from all over Italy each February.



The Basilica of Saint Valentine in Terni.

One Saint Valentine or Two?

Ancient sources speak of a Valentine who was a priest of Rome, buried on the Via Flaminia near Rome, and of a Valentine who was bishop of Terni, martyred in Rome and brought back to be buried in Terni, on the same road. Both are celebrated on February 14. Many historians think there was only one martyr, honored in both Rome and Terni. In Terni, local tradition emphasizes the bishop, pastor of his city.

The Basilica

A church is attested very early over the saint's tomb, outside the walls of the ancient town. The present building dates mostly from the 17th century, when it was rebuilt and entrusted to the Discalced Carmelites. The saint's relics are venerated there and draw the faithful throughout the year.

The February Festivities

On February 14, the bishop of Terni celebrates a solemn Mass in the basilica. In the days before, the city organizes several gatherings around the feast, and a special celebration brings together couples who come to renew their commitment or give thanks for their years of marriage. Engaged couples also come to ask for the saint's blessing before their wedding.

Tips for the Pilgrimage

Terni can be reached by train from Rome in a little over an hour. The basilica is away from the historic center: you can get there by bus or on foot, following the signs. Opening hours vary with the season and the celebrations, so it is best to check with the parish before you come, especially in February. The region offers other beautiful sites, such as the nearby Marmore Falls.

Other Places Associated with Saint Valentine

In Rome, the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, known for the Mouth of Truth, displays a skull attributed to Saint Valentine, crowned with flowers. On the Via Flaminia, north of Rome, the remains of the Catacomb of Saint Valentine survive. In Dublin, the Carmelite church on Whitefriar Street keeps relics given in 1836 by Pope Gregory XVI; it draws many couples on February 14.

Credits and sources

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