

## Saint Valentine - patron saint of love or something else?

**Every year, from the very beginning of February, we can see a red colour everywhere.** People get crazy about fluffy teddy bears, sweetest chocolates, beautiful flowers and all kinds of heart-shaped cards just to express their feelings for people their love the most. And all of that culminates on a Valentine's Day.

Valentine's Day is an annual feast celebrating love and romance all around the world. Traditionally, it takes place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February due to a person of St. Valentine of Rome or of Terni, whose feast is exactly on that day.



There are numerous stories surrounding the origins of this particular feast, including a story of St. Valentine's life itself. He is commonly considered to be a patron saint of courtly love but not everyone knows that it's actually his second patronage. Actually, he is mainly a patron saint of mental diseases and people who suffer from them.

Saint Valentine is a widely recognised 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman saint. According to the most popular legend considering his life, he was a doctor by profession and a clergyman by vocation. He was a bishop and a martyr in the times of the Roman Empire during the reigns of Emperor Marcus Aurelius Valerius Claudius Gothicus who, at his advisors' suggestion, forbid young men aged between 18 and 37 to get married. He did so as he considered single men without families and duties that come with it the best soldiers dedicated only to war. But a young clergyman Valentine did not obey that ban and secretly married legionnaires to women they wanted to spend their lives with and was imprisoned as a punishment.

During his time in prison he fell in love with his guard's blind daughter. According to the legend, his beloved one miraculously regained her sight as a result of the love Valentine gifted her with. When the Emperor found out, he ordered Valentine be killed as he considered it suspicious and dangerous. At the day preceding the execution, the future Saint wrote a love letter to his beloved one. He ended it with the words: "From Your Valentine". The execution took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 269. That is why, nowadays, people all over the world send each other cards and love letters signed in the same way.

Most of the churches dedicated to Saint Valentine are situated in Italy. Definitely, the most important one is the Church and Catacombs of San Valentine in Rome, which every year attracts lovers and engaged couples from around the world, who want to visit that place to celebrate their love and happiness. Even a Polish pope, John Paul II, send a letter to engaged couples who want to get married in that church and its quotation is now engraved on a marble plaque next to St. Valentine's tomb.

Talking about Valentine's Day nowadays, many of us think of St. Valentine as a symbol of courtly love and romance. His fame reached Poland in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and now there are many churches dedicated to him, eagerly visited by tourists since St. Valentine became a symbol of love here. But there are also people who perceive him in a completely different way. These are people who remember that, except for his patronage over love, St. Valentine's major interest and occupation was taking care of people suffering from epilepsy and other mental diseases. And it is a fact that churches dedicated to the saint nowadays were previously the places where mothers were bringing their sick children to pray for health for them. It happens sometimes that people who don't remember what love is anymore and want to prove its pointlessness and stupidity often refer to St. Valentine's Day as a feast of mentally sick and psychiatric people. That is why they often compare love to a state of mental disorder. They want to prove that love makes us sick and that it is something that we should be cured of.

But isn't it actually a fact commonly known that love is a feeling often compared to obsessive-compulsive disorder? Isn't it a feeling that influences our minds and the way we think the most? It is proven that when we are in love, our brain produces a mixture of chemical compounds, including dopamine and serotonin, which eventually are responsible for our feelings. When in love we feel happier, our feelings are intensified, everything seems to be better, people are kinder, art is more beautiful, we are more motivated, we want to dance, sing and change our lives for better.

So, if that is so, then let's hope that all of us get mentally disordered one day so that we can all every year celebrate this beautiful day - the 14<sup>th</sup> of February.

