

*Did you know . . .*

## **St. Valentine**

This Thursday is Valentine's Day, inspired by St. Valentine...but which one? It is uncertain exactly who inspired this special day; it may have been two different men. The Roman Catholic Church officially recognized St. Valentine as a real person who died around 270 AD, but his true identity was questioned by Pope Gelasius I as early as 496 AD, when he referred to the martyr and his acts as "being known only to God."

An account from the 1400s describes Valentine as a temple priest who was beheaded near Rome by the emperor Claudius II for helping Christian couples wed. Another claims Valentine was the

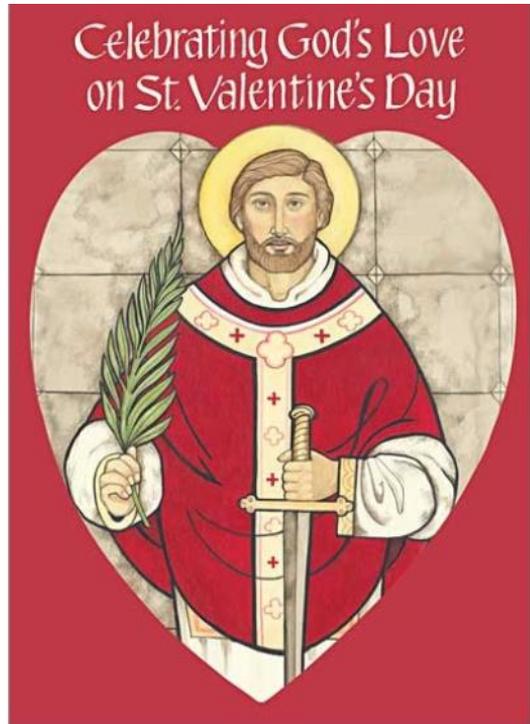
Bishop of Terni, also martyred by Claudius II on the outskirts of Rome. With these similarities, it's thought they may refer to the same person. Because of the confusion that surrounded the true identity of St. Valentine, the Catholic Church discontinued liturgical veneration of him in 1969, though his name remains on its list of officially recognized saints.

There are actually about a dozen St. Valentines, and a Pope Valentine, who served only 40 days around 827 AD. The saint we celebrate on Valentine's Day is known officially as St. Valentine of Rome in order to differentiate him from the others. "Valentinus"—from the Latin word for worthy, strong or powerful—was a popular nickname between the second and eighth centuries A.D., thus several martyrs over the centuries have carried this name.

The most recently beatified Valentine is St. Valentine Berrio-Ochoa, a Spaniard of the Dominican order who traveled to Vietnam, where he served as bishop until his beheading in 1861. Pope John Paul II canonized Berrio-Ochoa in 1988.

The flower-adorned skull of St. Valentine is on display in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, Rome. The excavation of a catacomb near Rome in the 1800s yielded skeletal remains and other relics now associated with St. Valentine. These bits and pieces of the late saint's body have subsequently been distributed to reliquaries around the world. Some bits of St. Valentine's skeleton are on display in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Scotland, England and France.

St. Valentine is the Patron of Happy Marriages, Young People, Beekeepers, Epilepsy, and of course, of Love.



**Judy Pearson**