

The Story of Saint Valentine

My name is Valentine. I am called a saint because many people saw the light of Christ shining through me. I was born long, long ago in ancient Rome. When I grew up, I became both a healer and a priest.

When I was an adult, a man named Claudius the Second was the Roman Emperor. Claudius felt a lot of pressure and stress because Rome was being attacked from all sides. Claudius needed more men to fight in the Roman army, but many men said, "We do not want to be soldiers. The soldiers do not get to see their wives and children for a long time. Being a soldier is too hard." Claudius thought to himself, "Hmm, the men in my empire do not want to be soldiers because they do not want to leave their wives and children. What shall I do? I need more men if I am going to win battles." Then an idea hit Claudius. He made an official decree stating that no one was allowed to get married! "If you are not married, you will not have wives and children to miss. Then you can be my soldiers! Marriage is now officially illegal!" he announced.

When Emperor Claudius made marriage illegal, many people in the empire became very sad. Some of my friends who were priests were afraid of Claudius, and they refused to marry the couples who came to them. I was afraid of Claudius too, but I knew that I needed to listen to what God was saying to me. And I believed God was telling me that I should perform a wedding ceremony for any couple who requested it. I began to marry people in secret, and word began to spread. Soon more and more couples came to me, asking me to marry them.

Finally, however, news of my actions reached Claudius. The emperor sent soldiers to arrest me. He told me that if I stopped following Jesus, he would spare my life. I told the emperor that I would never stop following Jesus. The emperor said that he would have me executed for not obeying him. And that's exactly what he did: Emperor Claudius had me thrown into jail until the time came for my execution.

When I was in jail, some of the couples I had married visited me and brought me flowers and letters. Their loving kindness touched my heart. Also while I was in jail, I became good friends

with the daughter of my jailer. She would visit me almost every day, and we talked about God's love and the beauty of friendship.

The night before I was killed, I asked my jailer for a piece of paper, a pen, and a string. I wrote a letter to the jailer's daughter, thanking her for being my friend. I signed the letter, "From your Valentine." I looked around my jail cell at the flowers some of the married couples had given me. I selected one of those flowers and wrapped it inside the letter, then tied the letter with the string. In the morning, as the guards led me off to my death, I handed the letter to my jailer, and asked him to give it to his daughter.

I died on February 14, 270. I hear that people around the world still celebrate the gift of love on February 14 by sharing cards and flowers with one another. I hope that on February 14 of this year, God will help you to notice all of the people who love you, and that you will thank them for that gift of love.

Thank you for listening to my story. *From your Valentine.*