

Celebrating Authentic Love

The month of February is associated with Love, popularly known as lover's month. The 14th of the month which falls this weekend, feast of St Valentine gives February its prominence in the life of humans.

As we celebrate Valentine's Day, we are reminded that love is at the heart of our humanity. We are created in love, redeemed in love, and commissioned to live our lives in love. St. Valentine, a priest who lived in the third century, embodied this love. He defied Emperor Claudius II's ban on marriage for soldiers, secretly performing weddings for young couples. His actions were motivated by his passion for true love and his commitment to upholding God's plan for marriage.

As we reflect on St. Valentine's story, we are reminded that love involves sacrifice. Valentine's actions ultimately led to his imprisonment and death, yet he remained committed to his values. Similarly, the soldiers who sought to marry despite the emperor's ban demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice for the sake of love.

In today's world, Valentine's Day has become commercialized, with businesses encouraging us to spend money on gifts for our loved ones. However, the true meaning of love and sacrifice that St. Valentine embodied is often lost in the noise.

Pope Francis reminds us that love is not just an emotion, but a relationship that requires effort and commitment to build. "We build a house together, not alone!" he exclaimed. "Let us build our family, church, community, friendship together all to the glory of God."

Saint John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* also reminds us that God loved us from the beginning. "God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion... Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being."

Love is inscribed in our very being, and our only possible response is to love God in return and participate in his ongoing mission of love and mercy.

As we celebrate Valentine's Day, let us put ourselves at the service of the Church and prepare ourselves to be sent out to make God's compassionate love present in the world. Let us remember that true love is not just a feeling, but a choice. It is a choice to put others before ourselves, to sacrifice for one another, and to trust in God's plan for our lives.

Blessings.