

Love be Defined?

As we're approaching Valentine's Day, I thought I'd reflect on this by revisiting its origins, and a couple of previous homilies about "love".

"Valentine's Day" dates back to 1st Century Rome, then under the rule of 'Claudius the Cruel'. A time when Roman men were hesitant to 'join-up' because of their strong attachment to their wives and families. So, to get rid of the problem, Claudius simply banned all marriages and engagements!!! Then along came Valentine of Terni (who was said to have been a Roman priest at that time), and it's believed that Valentine defied Claudius, and continued to perform secret marriages for young lovers. But when this was discovered, Claudius ordered his imprisonment; he was eventually beaten to death and beheaded. The sentence appears to have been carried out on **February 14th**, 269 A.D... and to honour his Martyrdom, the 'Feast of Saint Valentine' was established by Pope Gelasius 1st, in AD496, to be celebrated on February 14th.



Fast-forwarding to the modern-day custom of sending cards as a token of (romantic) love on St Valentines Day - this probably dates back to the early Nineteenth Century.

Now the English word "love" is used to describe at least four types of loving relationships.

- The relationship between the members of a family, which is based on mutual respect, mutual care, mutual support - and loyalty.
- The relationship between friends is also about loyalty, but implies the enjoyment of each other's company socially, sharing common interests and simply 'caring'.
- The romantic relationship between couples has more to do with absolute commitment to each other's well-being, enjoying and satisfying each other's physical and emotional desires, and, usually, to create a family.
- The relationship between Christ and His Church - well, that's all about absolute commitment, loyalty, trust faith, belief... not in human-to-human relationships, but in a personal relationship between 'us' and God.

- One-to-one - and this requires a 'surrender of self' to God's will for a 'greater good'.

So, when St Paul wrote that incredibly-beautiful 'poem' about love in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, he used the word - **agape** - as this specifically meant the love that Jesus Christ had for His church. Not the institution per se, but for His '**people-the-church**'. And he describes the qualities of Christ's love for us as: patience; kindness; not being envious or boastful, proud nor rude; selfless; slow to anger, quick to forgive; sympathetic; truthful; forbearing; trusting; persevering and steadfast.

To my way of thinking, there's only one other 'definition' of love that makes the point as succinctly; this is written in the First Epistle of John, Chapter 4: ***Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.***

Pure and simple... all love comes from God, as **He is love**.

Thought for the Week: Although Paul's poem refers to **agape**, the love of Jesus for everyone, the virtues of patience, kindness, selflessness, apply to us all in any kind of human relationships, and over-arch every other 'definition' of love. So, as we approach the Lenten Season, may we examine how our conduct actually measures up to Paul's description of love?

Are we 100% committed to **agape** ("The More Excellent Way ...")? Or are we generally more focused on earthly / secular love? When we fall short, it's then we remember, and should draw upon the support of, the Holy spirit (ever-present within- and between us), and strive towards **agape...** the ***Love that never fails***".

Dear God, thank you that you are a loving, gracious God. Thank you that you've offered us forgiveness and the gift of new life in you. Thank you that your love is perfect, it never fails, and that nothing can separate us from it.