A close-up of some text

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February 14, 2022

**VALENTINE’S DAY**

Pity poor Cyril and Methodius, who were ninth century missionaries to the Slavic peoples. The day which is set aside yearly in the church’s liturgical calendar on which they are to be remembered is February 14th. I’m afraid that most of us are too busy standing in lines at Florist shops and candy counters and searching for the right card to take much notice of their contributions to the life of the Church.

I must admit before going any further with this that I used to cynically believe that occasions like Valentine’s Day were created by Hallmark so they could sell cards. That was before I read an article by a young woman named Jodi Harness in (of all places) the Hannibal Courier-Post in February of 1995. Her research set me straight and gave me the background to answer the pressing question: who is this Valentine and what did he do to have such a popular day named after him?

It seems that in the third century A.D., the Roman Emperor Claudius II (268-270) abolished the institution of marriage thinking that married men made lousy soldiers. So, Valentine, a Christian Bishop, who was sympathetic to the cause of romance, married young lovers in secret. When the Emperor found out about it, he had Valentine brought before him and attempted to convert him to the Roman gods. This was in the time before Constantine, after whose influence the Roman Empire became Christian. Valentine refused to renounce his Christianity and paid the price. He was executed, but his martyrdom was not forgotten.

Years later, the tradition became established for Romans to court in mid-February. Men wrote affectionate letters to women they admired or wanted to get to know better. It became the custom to write these letters on February 14th. Thus St. Valentine, the martyred friend of lovers, became the patron saint of this special day. And that, as Paul Harvey was fond of saying, is the rest of the story.

Lest we think that this day is a modern observance, it should be noted that the earliest Valentine’s Day card in existence was sent in 1415. At any rate, Valentine’s Day is popular because romance is popular. Love makes the world go round, as the song tells us. However, it is important to know that there is a Christian basis for this day. But it’s too bad that amid all the “Hearts and Flowers” hoopla, Valentine and the fact that he laid down his life for love has been largely forgotten.

Richard B. Tudor