

## St. Valentine's Day

The 14th of February is a holiday of love and romance. It has its roots in the Roman celebration of Lupercalia, which is the festival of fertility held on February 15th. On that day all bachelors would draw the name of the woman who was to become their match for the year. When Christianity began to dominate, the Church attempted to eradicate this old pagan tradition and changed its name to St. Valentine's Day, which is now celebrated on February 14th. But who exactly was St. Valentine?

Well, it's not totally clear, because The Catholic Church honours at least three different saints of the same name, two of whom might have given rise to Valentine's Day as we know it today. One of them was a Roman priest who performed secret marriages for the emperor's soldiers (contrary to Emperor Claudius' wishes, of course). At that time the soldiers were prohibited from getting married because afterwards they didn't want to leave their families and go to wars on foreign lands. As a result of his disobedience, Valentine was sent to prison and executed on February 14th 269 AD.

Another legend says that Valentine might have been executed for helping early Christians escape Roman prisons. The romantic side to St. Valentine's legend is the story of him falling in love with the prison guard's daughter, whom he had cured of blindness. Gradually, all the legends merged into one and in 494 AD Pope Gelasius dec-

clared February 14th St. Valentine's Day.

Then, St. Valentine became the patron saint of lovers. By the

Middle Ages, he was one of the most popular saints in France and England.

There's yet another theory why February 14th was chosen as the holiday of love. People believed that this was the time when birds started to mate. Since doves and pigeons mate for life, they came to symbolise fidelity. Based on the idea of the birds finding their mates, young men chose their valentine by drawing names from the box on St. Valentine's Day. If a young girl, on the other hand, wanted to have a vision of her future husband, she had to go to a graveyard on the eve of St. Valentine's Day, sing a special chant and run around the church twelve times.

How do people express their feelings on Valentine's Day? They mostly send cards. The author of the first valentine might have been Valentine himself, who sent his goodbye letter signed 'From your Valentine.' Early valentine cards were hand-made, decorated with satin, lace, flowers or gold. Unusual valentines were made by lonely sailors who used shells to create hearts and flowers. In time, ready-made valentines began to dominate. Nowadays, in the USA alone, about one billion valentine cards are sent, making it the second largest card-sending



holiday, the first being Christmas. Oddly enough, women buy about 85 per cent of all cards!

There are a lot of Valentine symbols, the most typical being a heart, which used to be commonly linked with all emoticons and later came to signify love. Red roses, associated with the Roman goddess of love, have been used throughout the centuries to express this feeling. Moreover, the rearranged letters in the word 'rose' give Eros, the god of love. Cupid, which in Latin means 'desire', yet another symbol often used by lovers is a naughty winged boy who shoots arrows into people's hearts.

Why does the 'X' signify the kiss in a love letter? In times of illiteracy, people who could not write used this letter to sign documents. The 'X' meant sincerity and is nowadays used to seal letters with a kiss.

Despite its long and slightly mysterious origins, St. Valentine's Day has been and continues to be one of the most joyful holidays in our calendar.

Based on the text from 'The Festive Year' (resource book) published by Felberg SJA, 2005.

## I Still Love You

*Of all the things Ive ever said,  
Of all the tears Ive ever shed,  
Of all the things I did to you,  
I want you to know that I still love you.*



*Of all the days we fought and cried,  
Of all the days I wished Id died,  
Of all the things you did to pull me through,  
I dont believe it, but I still love you.*



### Glossary:

Lupercalia - Luperkalia (dawne rzymskie święto, stanowiące najprawdopodobniej pierwowzór dzisiejszych Walentynek)  
fertility - płodność  
eradicate - wyeliminować, zwalczyć  
pagan - pogański  
contrary to - przeciwnie do  
disobedience - nieposłuszeństwo  
blindness - ślepotą  
merge into - połączyć się  
mate - dobrać się w pary  
dove, pigeon - gołąb  
fidelity - wierność  
graveyard - cmentarz  
lace - koronka  
oddly enough - co ciekawe  
signify - oznaczać, mieć znaczenie  
goddess - bogini  
illiteracy - analfabetyzm  
sincerity - szczerłość  
seal - pieczętować

