

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

Numerous (at least 11) early Christian martyrs were named **Valentine**, which derives from the Latin *valens* meaning strong, worthy and powerful. The Valentines honored in Western Christianity on February 14th are two: **Valentine of Rome** (*Valentinus presb. m. Romae*) and **Valentine of Terni** (*Valentinus ep. Interamnensis m. Romae*), or maybe three. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Rome's saint is celebrated on July 6 and Terni's on July 30.

Valentine of Rome was a priest or a physician in Rome, who, after being interrogated by the **Emperor Claudius II** in person, was martyred for curing his fellow Christians and for performing weddings for Christian soldiers (married men could avoid conscription). He was buried on the Via Flaminia in 269. **Pope Gelasius I** added him to the calendar of saints in 469. His relics were first kept in his namesake church and catacombs, near the site of his martyrdom, which remained an important pilgrim site throughout the Middle Ages until they were transferred to Rome's Church of Santa Prassede during the pontificate of **Nicholas IV** (1288-92). His flower-crowned skull is exhibited in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. Other of his relics are found at St. Antón's Church in Madrid; at Whitefriar Street Carmelite Church in Dublin, Ireland, a gift in 1837 of **Pope Gregory XVI** (r. 1831-46); one of the saint's shoulder blades in Prague's Church of Peter and Paul at Vyšehrad, a gift of native-son **Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV** (r. 1346-78), apparently from his large collection of relics; in the parish church of St. Mary's Assumption in Chelmsno, Poland; in Mytilene on the Greek Island of Lesbos; and in the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta in Savona, Italy.

Instead, **Valentine of Terni** became bishop of Interamma (now Terni in Umbria). He is said to have been martyred during the persecution under Emperor Aurelian in 273.

Like Valentine of Rome, he was buried on the Via Flaminia, but in a different location. His relics are in his namesake basilica in Terni, although his head may be preserved in the Abbey of New Minster, in Winchester, England.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* lists a third **St. Valentine** who was mentioned in early martyrologies. He was martyred in Africa, but nothing more is known of him.

Since the Late Middle Ages, probably first mentioned in the *Parliament of Fowls* by Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400), a

LOVE MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

dream vision portraying a parliament for birds to choose their mates, the February 14 celebration has been associated with love. According to *Saints Preserve Us!* by **Sean Kelly** and **Rosemary Rogers**, this may be because of the mid-February pagan fertility feast *Lupercalia*, and/or from the medieval belief that birds choose their mates on that date. Besides Chaucer, some other early literary references to **St. Valentine's Day** include a 15th-century *rondeau* by **Charles, Duke of Orleans**, to his wife; **Ophelia's** in *Hamlet*; a poem by **John Donne**; and **Edmund Spenser's** epic *The Faerie Queen* (1590).

The custom of sending handwritten notes expressing love dates to 18th century England, but it may stem from an ancient Roman legend.

Rome's **Saint Valentine** is said to have restored sight to the blind daughter **Julia** of his jailer/judge **Asterius** and sent her a letter signed "Your Valentine" as a farewell the night before his execution by decapitation.

According to *Bede's Martyrology*, compiled in the 8th century, Julia, Asterius, and 46 members of their household then converted to Christianity.

Since the 19th century, handwritten notes have been replaced by mass-produced greeting cards.

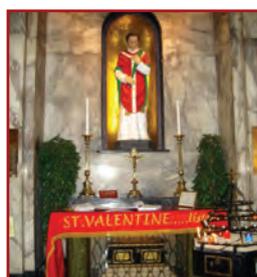
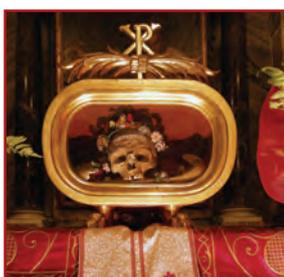
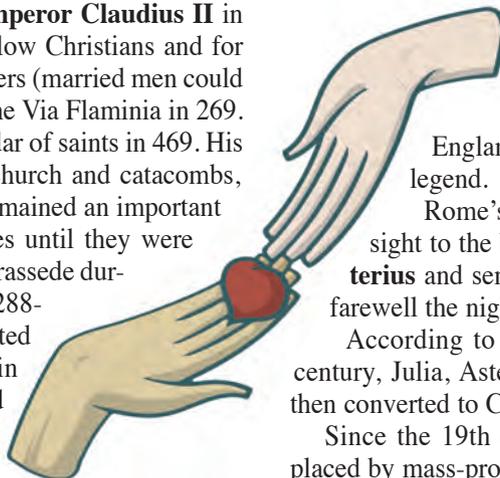
Recent statistics (2015) report that in the UK around half the population spends £1.9 billion on cards, flowers (customarily red roses), chocolates (a custom introduced by the British chocolate company Cadbury in 1868), and jewelry.

In the United States the average Valentine's spending has increased every year from \$108 a person in 2010 to \$131 in 2013.

In addition to Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, Valentine's Day, although not a public holiday in any country, is celebrated around the world, in Latin America, Bangladesh, China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, India (only half-heartedly), Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Philippines, Rumania, Singapore (the biggest spenders of all), Slovenia, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, and Taiwan, and, until recently, in Afghanistan, although it's banned in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Beside lovers, Valentine is also the patron saint of Terni, of course, of epileptics, of the blind, and of beekeepers.

In addition to chocolate, also peppercorns, honey and strawberries are popular ingredients worldwide in St. Valentine Day's recipes, but I found no particular dish. ○



From left: the skull of **St. Valentine of Rome** in Santa Maria in Cosmedin; St. Valentine of Rome's shrine in Dublin; a page from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*; and a page from a French medieval manuscript showing St. Valentine of Terni building his basilica

