

What Is Love?



So, Brothers, just when and how did a naked cherub with a bow and arrow get associated with a third century martyr? Better yet, how did it devolve into our annual National Hearts and Flowers Day ordeal? Let's consult two of our most authoritative resources for a few insights: Catholic.Org and Wikipedia.Org.

Celebrated on February 14, this Feast Day originated as a Western Christian liturgical feast day honoring one or more third century saints named Valentinus i.e., Valentine of Terni or Valentine of Rome. Apparently this priest-martyr got into trouble for marrying Christian couples and aiding persecuted Christians. He developed a relationship with Emperor, until he tried to convince Claudius II of Christianity. The Emperor became enraged, and commanded Valentine to renounce his faith or be beaten with clubs and beheaded.

The Feast became associated with romantic love within the circle of Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century, when the tradition of courtly love flourished. The custom grew, and evolved into an 18th century occasion for lovers to express their love for each other with flowers and candy. A later 19th century custom of handwritten valentines gave way to mass-produced greeting cards featuring – Cupid.

About now, you're probably wondering how I'm going to bridge this trivia into something more serious and spiritual. Simply by asking the question: What Is Love?

In classical mythology, Cupid is the son of love goddess Venus and war god Mars. How appropriate! He is the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection. His Greek name Eros is one of the four different words for the classical Greek word "Love." They are Eros, Philia, Storge, and Agape.

Éros, as we have already seen, means love, mostly of the sexual nature. Plato later refined his own definition beyond the initial feelings of passion to become an appreciation of the beauty within that person.

Philia means affectionate regard, friendship, usually between equals, and is the linguistic basis for the word “filial.” It is a dispassionate virtuous love, a concept developed by Aristotle which includes loyalty to friends, family, and community.

Storge means love, affection and is a common or natural empathy, especially like that felt by parents for offspring. It is also used when referencing the love for one’s country or a favorite sports team.

Agápe means love: especially charity or compassion, and is the highest form of love; the love of God for man and of man for God. Agape is used by Christians to express the unconditional love of God for his children. The New Testament refers to it as the covenant love of God for humans, as well as the human reciprocal love for God, and necessarily extends to the love of one's fellow man. Agape embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends, that serves regardless of circumstances. Thomas Aquinas further explained this type of love as: willing the good of another.

In closing, then, my filial Brother Knights, in the spirit of agape, and willing your good, I offer this suggestion. Unless you would like to share St. Valentine’s fate and be beaten and beheaded, I suggest that you order your flowers and make your Valentine’s Feast Day reservations by this coming Friday.