

This month I would like to say a few words about our last holiday: Valentine's Day — more specifically about a commercial that was popular on television just prior to Valentine's Day.

The commercial tried to sell you on purchasing a Giant Teddy Bear for your girlfriend. The pitch included the comments "Size really does matter" and: "If you want to score with your Valentine get the Big Love Bear" and: "Get a big reward that's sure to pay off for you. Go big and go home happy — no girl can resist."

It reminds me of an earlier time of growing up when a guy got a haircut in a barber shop rather than a hair salon. Invariably there were magazines to read (for men, of course) while you waited for your turn. There were magazines like "True Detective" and "Argosy."

Invariably, there would be an advertisement picturing a middle aged man projecting a penetrating look towards a vulnerable and obviously hypnotized attractive younger woman. For just a few dollars, the ad would promise, you could, just by utilizing certain secret techniques, use hypnosis to guarantee a, let's say, dominating relationship with a woman who would follow your every bidding.

Now I don't know about you, but I doubt if a Giant Teddy Bear would ever grant me dominating powers over women. A turn-off, if not worse, would seem to be the likely outcome of using this ploy. In fact, it really distorts the whole direction of Valentine's Day.

The history of the saint called St. Valentine is a little obscure. His life, in fact, may be a composite of more than one saint. But it is said that he was a bishop in a town in Umbria, Italy. He would secretly marry couples and that raised the ire of the emperor Claudius who needed unmarried soldiers to go to war. Eventually St. Valentine was martyred in Rome on February 14, which became his Feast Day and a day recognized for romantic love.

I found it interesting when I looked up February 14th in Butler's Lives of the Saints, I found that St. Cyril, who also died on that day in Rome, is venerated on the same day. It was St. Cyril who developed the 'cyrillic' characters that make up the Russian, Serbic, and Bulgarian alphabet.

So learning about Valentine's Day potentially could involve more than Giant Teddy Bears and female seduction. And such learning might correct the mistaken impression that many young boys of my generation had that their wives would probably have staples in their navels.