

February 14th: Valentine's Day.

All across the U.S. the secular world focuses on Valentine's Day as the perfect holiday to show how much you love someone. Florists and gift stores overflow with red and pink accessories. Chocolates and cards line the shelves or greet you on display when you enter the grocery store. Restaurants are filled with people celebrating those they love in their life.

Valentine's Day has become a holiday centered on romance under the guise of love. But to understand why love is so special, we must look beyond our current celebrations, and instead look at why this holiday is celebrated at all.

February 14th: St. Valentine's Feast Day.

The story of St. Valentine is bizarre and not because of any outlandish deeds or awe-inspiring miracles. Rather, St. Valentine's life is bizarre because not much is known about him. It's even reported there are three different St. Valentines who were alive during the early Church. However, there is one thing all three St. Valentines have in common: they were martyrs. Each of these saints refused to renounce their faith and they were killed for it. St. Valentine so loved the Lord he was willing to die.

This emphasis on love shouldn't be surprising considering the most well-known fact about St. Valentine is that he is the patron saint of love and marriage.

Valentine's Day highlights marriage extensively as it directly connects with our modern celebration of the holiday. Many gifts and commercials focus on the romantic love between partners, showing representation of this love across billboards and TV, where different retailers portray a perfect image of two people utterly in love. It's a nice image, yet it still falls woefully short of portraying the beauty of love. The Sacrament of Marriage is a beautiful rite which focuses on a couple's commitment to each other and how marriage is not just about romance, but about the mutual gift of self.

This is why it is important to note that while there is often an emphasis on marriage, St. Valentine is the Patron saint of *love* and marriage.

Romance may be a part of marriage, but it is love, and mutual self-giving that makes marriage what it is.

So, where can we find representations of love? What even is the greatest form of love we can show? Not just the love we give romantic partners, but the love we can share with everyone.

If the love we are called to share is meant to center on giving, there is only one term that fully encapsulates this ideal.

Agape is the Greek term for selfless love. It is a love that gives without asking anything in return. To express agape is to give oneself for no reason other than

because you love. It does not ask or expect anything in return, because agape is about the *gift* of love.

One of the main beauties of the Catholic faith is that at its center, everything is about the gift of love. God loves us, and so He gives us grace and free-will. All the blessings in our life come from God as He shows His love for us. He even gave us His son to die for our sins because His greatest desire is for us to be close to Him and to love Him in return.

God is *agape*. His love is the greatest display of selfless love in existence.

God asks us to love, not because of some holiday or because of some feeling, but because He gave us love as a *gift*. When that love overflows, we must share it.

St. Valentine knew this. He gave his *life* for it. He knew that God's love for him was infinite and beyond measure, and that gave him the strength to stand firm in the face of death.

The Feast of St. Valentine may be well-known for its secular celebrations, but the most important part of this day is not some chocolate heart or stuffed animal. Flowers may be pretty, but there is something far more magnificent to remember.

Love is the greatest gift we've ever received. Love is the greatest gift we can ever give. God gave us love for a reason, and it was to carry love with us, everywhere we go and to share it with everyone we see.