



LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS

A New Column by Fr. Tom

Love and Lent

Recently, a comedian quipped, "This year, Ash Wednesday is St. Valentine's Day and Easter is April Fools' Day - boy, the Catholics have it tough this year!" I disagree. In fact, I think that maybe it's apropos that Lent begins on Valentine's Day, and I'll give you three reasons why.

First, let's talk about St. Valentine. He was a priest in the Third Century who believed in Christian marriage so much that he married young couples in secret, even though marriage was outlawed by Emperor Claudius II. (Outlawing marriage! No wonder he was known as Claudius the Cruel.) Valentine was imprisoned for these "unlawful" weddings, but his faith kept him strong. During his imprisonment, he befriended his jailer and later converted him, and many members of his family, to Christianity. It is even said that his prayers for the jailer's blind daughter helped to heal her of her blindness. Eventually, Valentine was brutally martyred because he would not denounce his Christian faith. St. Valentine is the patron for love, but he is also a reminder that love requires sacrifice.

That brings me to the second reason that Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday might not be in conflict. Lent is the season where we discover how we can love even more than we do today. Lent is the season where we prepare for the Paschal Mystery - the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus - the Greatest Act of Love this world has ever known! Jesus showed us what love truly means. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." [JN 15:13] What better way to begin this season of preparation than on the day that many people throughout the world - whether they are Christian or not - celebrate love?

As we celebrate love and strive for greater love in our lives, then also our Lenten goal should be to remove all those things that get in the way of love. We call those things, sin. Our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving are some of the ways that we strive to remove the sins in our lives, in order to allow for greater love. We will explore each of these Lenten practices in greater detail during the season of Lent.

Love and Lent - these two go hand in hand!

Stay tuned to this column at Easter when we discuss the proper connection