Before us lies the journey of life

The troubled waters seem insurmountable

But then through the mist a way opens

A bridge we never thought was there

Love finds a way...

The Origin of St. Valentine's Day

So, who was this "hero of hearts" we honor on February 14th? It is important to remember that this man called "Valentine" lived long before the church was officially established in Rome. At that time no one was officially called a "saint." In the middle of the third century when Valentine lived in Rome, the number of believers was still relatively small, and they often suffered persecution as a heretical sect of Judaism. They were called "Christians" by those who hated and persecuted them. Valentine, like all other believers during that period, was liable to be imprisoned if he did anything that angered the government.

Though his exact story has not been clearly preserved, it has been recorded that he lived in Rome, and that he assisted and sheltered the ill-treated believers, during the great persecutions under Emperor Claudius II. He is also said to have been caught performing marriages for young couples in Rome during the time when the Emperor had issued a ban on all marriages for the sake of amassing a huge army of unmarried soldiers to send off to battle. Valentine was apprehended and sent by the Emperor to the prefect of Rome. When he saw that all his threats to make Valentine renounce his faith were ineffectual, sentenced him to be beaten with

clubs and then beheaded. The execution took place on February 14, about the year 270 A.D.

It was not until after the persecuted church was unexpectedly adopted forty years later by the new Emperor of the Roman Empire, named Constantine, that the official Roman church was founded. This newly established state church in Rome then attempted to preserve the memory of the heroes in the past who had died for their faith. They designated them as "martyrs," and decided that some should even be specially honored as "saints." Thus the word "Saint" was added to the name Valentine. However, when Valentine was still alive, he would not even have responded if someone would have addressed him as *St. Valentine.*

Pope Julius I is said to have built a church near Ponte Mole in Rome to the memory of Valentine, Porta Valentini. The name was later changed to Porta del Popolo.

To abolish the heathens' lewd superstitious custom of boys drawing the names of girls, in honor of their goddess Februata Juno, on the fifteenth of February in 496 A.D., Pope Gelasius marked February 14th as a celebration in honor of Valentine's martyrdom. This celebration seemed to fit well to maintain the "romantic" aspect of the day while substituting a more "Christian flavor."

Though the exact origin of St. Valentine remains somewhat of a mystery, whoever he was, Valentine really existed because archaeologists have unearthed a Roman catacomb and an ancient church dedicated to Valentine.

The first representation of Saint Valentine appeared in *The Nuremberg Chronicle,* a great illustrated book printed in 1493. Alongside a woodcut portrait the text states that "*Valentinus was a Roman priest martyred during the reign of Claudius the Goth [Claudius II]. He was caught marrying young couples and aiding believers who were being persecuted under Emperor Claudius in Rome, Valentinus was arrested and imprisoned. He was condemned to death, and beheaded outside the Flaminian Gate in Rome.*" [circa 269]

Thus, this devoted believer of the third century has been immortalized as one who embodies the heart of romantic love. He was a kind man who risked his life to save his friends and to honor the loving relationship of marriage. Many sweet stories have been attached to his life, which may or may not be true. But, if he is remembered for upholding the principle of marriage and defending the persecuted, then he is rightly honored. The love which Valentine gave his life for was more than just an emotional show of affection. It was the kind of love that endures in a lifelong covenant of marriage. He gave his life to make sure the young people were able to make their vows...

Today in 2005, we rarely see a demonstration of this kind of devotion and would profit from giving a little time to consider the virtue of this simple believer named *Valentine.*

(Historic information from *Catholic Encyclopedia* and *Catholic Online,* www.catholic.org/saints/)

LOVE IS THE BRIDGE

In the troubled times that lie ahead, many people are seeking for a safe passage. Weary from the many disappointments encountered in the storms of life, many abandon the search for **LOVE** altogether. But the forlorn traveler can find hope. For long ago there was a man who walked this earth who embodied Love. He lived an unblemished life of selfless Love. Thus He qualified to become the bridge for others… the bridge back to the One who is **LOVE.** God is Love. Thus humans, who are created in His image, should be able to manifest this same unselfish Love, which is God's essence.

That one man was able to see His way through all the opposition. He is the Messiah, known under heaven by a name that would be above all names. Though many languages have translated his name down through the centuries with various spellings and sounds, in the beginning when He was named by His mother, He was called Yahshua. No need to

try to make the name anything else, "Yahshua" is just fine. It is a Hebrew name for a baby boy born into a Jewish family in Israel. His little life changed the course of history. Wars have been fought, crusades waged, heretics tortured, all in the name of this one simple man. And how His simple message has been debated, dissected, and reduced to a dogma that in no way resembles the authentic one!

To pass to the other side takes complete trust in the bridge. So, we can stay in the storm on the shore, discussing the merits of the bridge, but trusting gets us up onto the bridge… and across to the other side…

Yahshua is the bridge back to the Father
He died that we might live
There's nothing else I'd rather do
than live for You
I love you
I never want to
leave you…

(The words of the famous New Zealand poet, Tshanu)

I love you...