Happy Valentines’ Day

As we approach Valentine’s Day, it’s probably important to have some historical context of the original St Valentine. According to legend, St Valentine signed a letter “from your Valentine” to his jailor’s daughter, whom he had befriended and healed from blindness. Another common legend states that he defied the Emperor’s orders and secretly married couples to spare the husbands from having to go to war. Valentine’s Day is a lovers’ festival dating back to the 14th century. St Valentine himself had some historical basis. He was a patron saint of lovers, epileptics and beekeepers. Yes all of that sound a little unusual. What we are quite sure of is that St Valentine was a Roman Catholic priest and physician who suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Christians by the emperor Claudius II Gothicus about year 270. His life was significant enough that Pope Julius I reportedly built a basilica over his grave.

Today, we celebrate St Valentine’s Day with those who are our significant other. Some of you will be purchasing cards, chocolate and flowers. Others will be making dinner reservations or planning a quiet, romantic evening at home. I dare say that this celebration is not restricted to our spouse or significant other, but rather to the people in our lives that we love. It may be an opportunity to show a gesture of kindness to a son or daughter or perhaps son-in-law or daughter-in-law. It might even be an opportunity to tell your grandchildren about the original St Valentine and how his faith led him to do extraordinary acts of kindness and compassion while always being considerate of others. A valuable lesson indeed.

For those of us who are most likely to focus on one other person it might be important to consider five core values in our relationship with that person that we say we love the “most”. Let me note that we live in a busy, chaotic, confusing and sometimes even cruel world. That said, I would propose these core values in sharing our love with the person we hope to spend our lives with. These key core values include: kindness, compassion, clemency, consideration and Christ centeredness.

In a world that has forgotten spontaneous acts of kindness perhaps we can consider that core value in our homes. It doesn’t have to be an extraordinary action. It may be as simple as listening. It might be as significant as preparing a meal or purchasing an unrequested gift. When it comes to compassion, it starts with empathetic listening and a gentle embrace. You will often be surprised how simply those two deliberate actions can bring comfort to another human being. I often think of the concept of clemency. This will be the most difficult core value to apply in your most significant relationships. Clemency is unwarranted forgiveness. This means to accept a person the way they are. Forgive their errors and begin again. When it comes to the concept of consideration this simply means putting the other person’s needs first. It doesn’t mean that you don’t get what you need. It does mean that they get what they need first.

Last but not least, I have often found it helpful to suggest that we all try to remember that Christ is in the room for every conversation. Christ is in the room in the midst of every conflict. Christ is in the room for every compromise. Indeed, Christ is in the room for every complex conversation that somehow needs to conclude with a loving embrace.

Yours in Christ, Stephen