

Column – St. Valentine

The transition from Christmas to Valentine's Day is rather sudden. In the blink of an eye, in the retail world out goes Santas and Christmas trees and in comes candy hearts and cards.

Last Sunday at the coffee hour, I learned something new. A church member said that at the school her grandchild attends in northern Virginia St. Valentine's Day has been replaced by 'Friendship' Day. When I asked why, she said she was not exactly sure.

No doubt this renaming attempt comes from the same empty-headed folk who tried a few years ago to rebrand Christmas as "Winter Solstice" and who continue to rally for Columbus Day becoming "Indigenous People" Day. What seems clear is that some people have too much time on their hands. How we need Andy Rooney back to exercise his acerbic wit on such foolishness and those who propagate it.

I don't know for sure but just perhaps this move to replace St. Valentine's Day with Friendship Day comes from a rabid hostility in some quarters for anything that potentially has anything to do with Christianity.

While details concerning the life of St. Valentine are sketchy, what seems certain is that he was a 3rd-century Christian martyr, a priest or a bishop. According to legend, he got crossways with the authorities for secretly officiating at the marriage of Roman soldiers, the conventional wisdom of the day being that single men made better soldiers. Emperor Claudius II had Valentine executed on Feb. 14 around 270 A.D.

Another legend about this patron of love was that he was used by Christ to restore sight to the blind daughter of a judge. After finishing his work, he left behind a note signed "Your Valentine."

It is hard to say how much of the lore associated with Valentine is true. Nevertheless, his name is associated with Christianity, and that may be enough to make certain anti-Christian secularists

uncomfortable with the traditional name for this holiday and thus their reason for wanting to rebrand it.

As far as the name “Friendship” Day, there is certainly nothing objectionable to highlighting that aspect of this holiday, especially as it is observed in elementary schools. After all, the cards passed that day have more to do with goodwill than romantic love.

I remember an embarrassing moment when I was in the first grade. A day or so before the 14th we stapled together two pieces of colored construction paper making sleaves for cards. After decorating them with hearts, with the assistance of the teacher, we hung them on a string over hot water radiators on the outside wall of the classroom.

The reason I was embarrassed was I thought you were to give a card only to the girl you especially liked. So, I brought to school that day an elaborate card for this certain girl I had my eye on. When time came to deposit it into her sleave, I discovered you were supposed to have a card for every member of

the class, boy and girl. In my defense, I was only five when I started school and had never attended kindergarten or pre-school. It was “the first time I had left my father’s farm,” to paraphrase one of the great poets.

So, Valentine’s Day, especially for young children, does involve love of a more general nature. And this general love, call it friendship if you like, should prevail for people of all ages. To quote the apostle Paul, “Let love be without dissimulation . . . Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”

If you want to include that in your celebration, of St. Valentine’s Day, count me in. Just keep your ‘political correctness’ at home and don’t go tampering with the name. Again, where is that old curmudgeon Andy Rooney when you need him?

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted

dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. (Collect for Quinquagesima, Book of Common Prayer).

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