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Happy Feast of Lupercalia



In ancient Rome, February 15th, was the Feast of Lupercalia. The festival observed and celebrated the rite of passage from boy into manhood and was dedicated to the god, Lupercus. On the eve of the festival, February 14th, the names of Roman girls were written on slips of paper and placed into jars. Each young man would draw a girl's name from the jar and would then be coupled for the duration of the festival, usually for sexual experiences.

In an effort to do away with this festival, in the 5th century Pope Gelasius ordered a slight change in the lottery. Instead of the names of young women, the box would contain the names of saints. Both men and women were allowed to draw from the box, and the idea was to emulate the ways of the saint they drew during the rest of the year. Needless to say, the young Roman men and women were not too pleased with the rule changes and it never caught on.

So the church looked for a suitable patron saint to take the place of the god, Lupercus. They found an appropriate choice in Valentine, who, in AD 270 had been beheaded by Emperor Claudius. Claudius had determined that married men made poor soldiers, so he banned marriage from his empire. But Valentine would secretly marry young men and women who came to him. Claudius stoned and beheaded Valentine for that, supposedly on February 14th, though probably the date was selected to undermine the popular holiday of Lupercalia.

St. Valentines Day did catch on and the mid-February holiday continued to be used by Roman men to seek the affection of women. It became a tradition for the men to give the ones they admired messages of affection, containing Valentine's name.

The first true Valentine card was sent in 1415 by Charles, duke of Orleans, to his wife. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London at the time.

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