

SAINTS ALIVE!

ST. VALENTINE

February 14

Thursday February 14 is Valentine's Day. For years I assumed that this began as a greeting card holiday. Though February 14 is a day marked by the consumer products of cards, flowers, candy, food and jewelry, February 14 is also the feast day of St. Valentine, the patron saint of love and happy marriages.

Love. Billions of words have been spilled to define it, explain it, and explore its dimensions.

The Catholic Church provides an attractive exploration: "Human beings were created in the image and likeness of God for love and that complete human fulfillment only comes about when we make a sincere gift of ourselves to others" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Compendium, 337).



What does a "sincere gift of ourselves to others" look like?

Catholic social teaching instructs us that the person is not only sacred but also social. Men and women were born not to remain isolated but to be in community. Community manifests itself in many forms including neighborhoods and global solidarity. We also see community in marriage, the central social institution, which, the Church reminds us, must be supported and strengthened, not undermined.

As a child who grew up in a broken family, I can empathize with the spouses and children in a broken marriage; I feel their pain. The salve of Church teaching can help: sometimes couples are not able to achieve the ideal of a life-long marriage. There are many reasons why marriages fail. They are personal and not easy to sort through.

Thus, while marriage remains the central social institution, the Church understands that any institution may falter because it is made up of humans who are imperfect. It is because of our imperfections that we strive to see marriages supported and strengthened, thereby providing an environment where each partner can make a sincere gift of his or her self to his or her spouse.

This is love, an essential ingredient in any happy marriage.

This Valentine's Day, in addition to the chocolates and roses, let us offer a prayer to St. Valentine for love and for married couples, a happy marriage.

