

A message from the Bishop of Salisbury, Nicholas Holtam

Love is...

For Card shops, 14th February is second only to Christmas. For Florists it is the busiest day of the year. The tradition of celebrating romantic love on 14th February probably has more to do with the coming of Spring and the pairing of birds in second century Rome than with the virtues of a saint we're not sure ever existed. So the Church doesn't do St Valentine anymore. How sad is that in a world in which, "All we need is love"!

The Scriptures declare:

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God.

1 John 4.7

Most of us build our lives on romantic love, and make promises to the person we love which become the basis of our lives. Romantic love is the most common way in which we form loving partnerships which are also an economic and social unit and in which our children grow. Romantic love creates relationships that are the basis of our society.

Love is a rich, diverse word. As well as the strong physical attraction of erotic love, love has aspects of affection, friendship and charity, building relationships. Love helps us find unity with each other; it creates deep communion between people who know their need of each other. In love we learn to accept our differences, our weaknesses as well as our strengths. In love we learn to forgive and love deepens and matures through life.

The Church has given up on Valentine in a time when we most need Church to be confident about what it is to love. Of course we should celebrate St Valentine's Day because it points us to the truth of love being from God. All brides are beautiful because we are transfigured by love. That must be why Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding".

It isn't by chance that Lent is also in the Springtime of the year. In Lent we see God's love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Love is the way of life into which we are born and are baptised. It is not just an emotional feeling, love is our Lord's command, God's will. It is instinctive *and* demanding, involves giving *and* receiving, celebration *and* discipline.

Have a happy St Valentine's Day and a holy Lent. In both you will be committed to the love of God.

+ Nicholas Scriven