

Risen Christ



Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

14 & 15 February 2026

**The Catholic Communities of
Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency**



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

Lent 2026 The Sacred journey of 100 days begins on Ash Wednesday



From **Ash Wednesday (18 Feb)** to **Pentecost Sunday (24 May)**, in the middle of this journey we have 'Holy Week' which begins with **Palm Sunday** on 29 March and builds to **Easter Sunday** on 5 April. 'Fire' is the sacred symbol linking the seasons of Lent and Easter together culminating in the sacred Fire of the Easter Vigil and the lighting of the Easter Candle - Christ our Light. This sacred time concludes with a final second 'Holy Week', starting with the **Ascension of the Lord (17 May)** and ending with **Pentecost (24 May)**.

Ash Wednesday Masses

Eltham 9:30am at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church
Montmorency 7:00pm at St Francis Xavier Catholic Church

Gospel: Matthew 5:17-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.

'For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother "Fool" he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him "Renegade" he will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.

'You have learnt how it was said: You must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body go to hell.

'It has also been said: Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal. But I say this to you: everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of fornication, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

'Again, you have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: you must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all, either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by the earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great king. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'

*This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.
We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.*



PARISH TEAM & INFORMATION

OUR PEOPLE & OUR CONTACT DETAILS



Parish Priest

Michael Sierakowski - **Moderator**

Michael.Sierakowski@cam.org.au

Parish Office

all correspondence to:

86 Mayona Road,
Montmorency Vic 3094
9435 4742

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler:

Parish Secretary

Tue-Fri 9am-3pm

Peter Williams:

Safeguarding Officer

RisenChrist.ChildSafety@cam.org.au

Volunteers

Marisa Capuana: Various

Kerry Mash: Wed & Fri 10am-3pm

www.melbcatholic.org/risenchristparish

Facebook: [Risen Christ Parish](https://www.facebook.com/RisenChristParish)

Risen Christ Parish Bulletin items:

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Schools

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888

principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Principal: Rudy Vail: 9439 7824

school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Jo Nolen: 9435 8474

principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

RECONCILIATION

available half an hour before
any weekday or weekend Parish Mass.

Collections: 2 & 9 Feb 2026

Thanksgiving	Cash	\$2,485.75
	Electronic	\$9,470.00
Presbytery	Cash	\$1,577.80
	Electronic	\$325.00

Thanksgiving Offering

Month	Total
November	\$15,369.89
December	\$18,205.17
January	\$20,972.17

Risen Christ Parish Calendar of Events

Saturday 14

12:00pm Baptisms: Riley, Christopher Montmorency

6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 15

8:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Mass Eltham

12:00pm Baptisms: Cody, Jesse, William Eltham

Monday 16

7:30pm RCIA Eltham

Tuesday 17

9:30am Mass & SFX Yr 2 Montmorency

10:00am Rosary Montmorency

10:00am Craft Group Montmorency

11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry Eltham

2:00pm Bethany Small Church Community Montmorency

Wednesday 18 - Ash Wednesday

6:30am Meditation Montmorency

9:30am Mass: Ash Wednesday Eltham

1:00pm Kairos Small Church Community Montmorency

7:00pm Mass: Ash Wednesday Montmorency

Thursday 19

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Montmorency

10:30am ASRC Food Collection Montmorency

11:30am Funeral: Maria Casamento Montmorency

2:00pm Meditation Eltham

Friday 20

9:30am Mass Eltham

Saturday 21

6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 22 - First Sunday of Lent

8:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Mass Eltham

Monday 23

7:30pm RCIA Eltham

Tuesday 24

9:30am Mass & SFX Yr 3 Montmorency

10:00am Rosary Montmorency

7:00pm Jordan Small Church Community Montmorency

Wednesday 25

6:30am Meditation Montmorency

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Eltham

Thanksgiving

Dear Parishioners,

Following is a list of ways in which you can give towards the running of our Parish (left to right):

A) EFTPOS terminals

B) scan the QR code (<https://bit.ly/45ifhRp>) & donate to any Parish finance campaign including Thanksgiving, Presbytery Offerings, baptisms etc

C) cash/coins in the collection baskets at each church

D) thanksgiving envelopes

E) set up payments from credit/debit cards/bank account

Thank you for your generous support,

Michael





*Let us pray for all those who have gone
before us marked with the sign of faith ...*

Montmorency

For those in need of **healing**, remembering especially:

*Nora Edmond, Pat Hosmer, Siobhan Lappin, Jarrod Mizzi,
Cindy & Ed Morrissey, Regina Roszczenko (mother of Liz Gray),
Phil Rovtar, Jeanne Vanderwert, Brian Witten*

For the recently **deceased**:

Maria Casamento, Anne Mulder

For those whose **anniversaries** are at this time:

James Barwick, Eileen Hart, Denis Hollyoak

Eltham

For those in need of **healing**, remembering especially:

*Stephen Andrew, Des Arneson, Bill Boyce, Penny Boyce,
Ruth Decker, Mary Luttick, Rose Mitas, Bernard Murray, Audrey Tunks*

For those whose **anniversaries** are at this time:

Elisabeth & Frank Bruitzman, Denis Hollyoak, Mary Betty Wall

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office

9435 4742 or RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au.



**Congratulations to all who celebrate
their sacraments this weekend:**

Saturday, 14th February, 2026

St Francis Xavier, Montmorency, 12:00pm

Christopher Myles Ferguson

Riley Frank Prowse

Baptism

Baptism

Sunday, 15th February, 2026

Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham, 12:00pm

William Paul Galea

Cody Munro Ross

Jesse Munro Ross

Baptism

Baptism

Baptism



SAFEGUARDING ESSENTIALS GROUP TRAINING

Saturday 21 February 2026

10:00am at Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham

Just a reminder that the second of our Safeguarding Essentials Online Training Module Group Training sessions is to be held on **Saturday 21 February at 10am**.

As you know the training module is required to be completed by all volunteers once every three years. As it has been three years since the last training sessions were held it is now time to undertake the training again.

If you have or will be unable to attend either of these sessions you will need to complete the training online, through the Melbourne Catholic website (<https://melbournecatholic.org/safeguarding>), as soon as possible.

Whilst this training session is designed for volunteers, we encourage all interested parishioners to attend.

Tea and coffee will be available after the session. Please bring a plate.

Should you have any questions about the training or need further information about it please contact Peter Williams.



Roster for week ending 15 Feb 2026

Bacani, Brian	W6:00
Capuana, Marisa	W6:00
Clark, Helen	H10:00
Cseh, Nika	R10:00
Dopheide, Marlis	E10:00
Edwards, Elisabeth	C10:00
Haines, Geoff	E10:00
Haines, Jan-Marie	E10:00
Hall, Vali	ASE
Iliffe, Yvonne	E10:00
Mallia, Anthony	E10:00
McKinley, Michael	W8:30
Nolan, Mike	PRYR
Ramsdale, John	W8:30
Rygala, Ella	H10:00
Said, Marie	ASRC
Said, Mike	ASRC
Skipper, Patsy	LoW-01 Thu
Stewart Family	PRSE
Volunteer please	H10:00
Volunteer please	H10:00
Watson, Denis	CLNR

Roster for week ending 22 Feb 2026

Boyd, Mary	PRYR
Capuana, Marisa	LoW-01 Thu
Donnellan, Denise	E10:00
Drljo, Frank	CLNR
Dunell, Linda	ASE
Dunell, Linda	E10:00
Furtado, Lorraine	C10:00
Haines, Geoff	E10:00
Kenny, Michael	W6:00
Kulkens, Mark	W6:00
Love, Kathleen	E10:00
Reardon, Kathy	H10:00
Reardon, Peter	E10:00
Reardon, Peter	H10:00
Scully, Greg	H10:00
Scully, Helen	H10:00
Skipper, Patsy	CLNR
Sullivan, Frances	W8:30
Williams, Peter	R10:00
Wood, Marie	W8:30
Zavadil Family	PRSE

ASE = Altar Society @ Eltham;

C = Commentator;

CLKR = PowerPoint Clicker @ SFX;

CLNR = Cleaner @ SFX; **R** = Reader;

E = Eucharistic Minister;

H = Hospitality;

LoW-01 = Liturgy of the Word with Communion @ SFX;

PRSE = Pilgrim Rosary Statue @ Eltham;

M = Music; **W** = Minister of the Word

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults - R.C.I.A. - 2026

As we begin our Lenten Journey, I present to the Parish community the 6 candidates in our Adult program in R.C.I.A. It is vitally important that we pray for them as they embark on this intense final season that we all know as these sacred 40 days. At the Easter celebrations, these 6 adults will be baptised and confirmed into our faith tradition and fully incorporate their lives into the Catholic life of Risen Christ Parish. Please pray for them!



Ross Bowlby

Hi, I'm Ross. I'm 45 years old and a proud father to two children: Charlotte, who attends Eltham Bridge Kids, and Alex, who is five years old and in Grade 1 at OLHC Primary School. I was introduced to the church through the school community and have really come to value the strong spiritual focus and welcoming sense of community it offers. I have a mixed background, with an American father and an Australian mother. I grew up in Bendigo, close to my mum's family, who have been sheep and cattle farmers for six generations. After finishing school, I moved to Melbourne to attend university. For the past 20 years, I worked in commercial property. Last year, I made a significant career change and now work in Woodend as a stable hand at a thoroughbred and agistment stud. It's the hardest work I've ever done, but also the most rewarding. A fun fact about me: at 29, I quit my job and spent a year backpacking around the world, visiting 45 countries. It was one of the most reward years of my life – second only to becoming a father to my two children.



Rebecca Goddard

I am a mother of three young boys with our fourth baby due April 2026. I'm enjoying the RCIA journey and am looking forward to my baptism at Easter. I am joining the Catholic Church to follow the teaching of Jesus, inspiring the best of humanity for the betterment of our community.



Matthew Peckham

I live in Rosanna with my wife, Lisa, and my two daughters, who are 10 and 8. I grew up in the area, and work as a barrister. I am a regular at Warringal parkrun and other local running groups. When I was younger, I was part of the Antioch Youth Group at St Francis Xavier, although I was not raised as a Catholic. I am seeking baptism with my daughters, because I am moved by the Christian message of peace, grace and love for one another. It was important for me in young life, and also for my young family.



Daniel Glass

Hello, my name is Daniel Glass. I am originally from USA and have lived in Australia for the last twenty years. I enjoy time with my family, coach youth basketball and am a videographer by trade. I have reached out to RCIA as I feel like I need a faith foundation to guide my life. I was inspired by my late Father and Ian and my wife and her family who have strong Catholic roots. I want to give more space for God in my life after living day by day without a strong spiritual purpose, but always felt there was more to life than what we strive for in modern society. I also want to be a role model for my children to reach out to others, help others and live for a larger purpose than oneself.



Brooke Nankervis

I am 40 years old, I have a husband, Daniel, and 3 beautiful children, Leo, Asher and Ned. Leo and Asher both go to SFX primary school and Ned is in kinder. I grew up in Eltham and now live in Greensborough. I have decided to be a part of this program so I can have a better understanding of the church and Catholic values that my children have been learning at school. I also love the feeling of community it brings to your family.



Daniel Buchanan

My name is Daniel, I'm 37 years old and I live in Eltham with my wife Erin and our 3 kids. My oldest daughter started kindergarten this year. I'm a builder, specialising in apartment towers around the bayside area. I'm looking forward to being baptised at Easter.

An education of the heart

The centuries-old forms of religious belief are dead, and the contemplative revolution that Jesus launched is entering a new phase / by **Laurence Freeman**

Religion is a result of our capacity to imagine reality beyond the appearances of this world. It began early: why else would our ancestors have buried the dead with signs of an afterlife, 300,000 years ago? Thinking about the future of religion demands an historical perspective and a spirit of detachment from our personal beliefs. This is painful but necessary if we are to discern the patterns we are experiencing and the decisions we will need to make.

Today, like the environment and like democracy, religion is in distress. Religion will not disappear, but it will radically change. Like music or poetry, religion is indestructible - but what kind of religion will survive? However it evolves, the religion of the future will shape human life more thoroughly than what kind of economy emerges.

We don't know what the Neanderthals or our ancestors in the magical, "enchanted" stage of human consciousness who painted the cave walls of Chauvet or Sulawesi believed. But we know what the Mesopotamians, who founded the first cities and civilisations, believed. They applied their rigorous form of science to the belief that examining the liver of a sacrificed sheep could reveal what the gods were planning for them. They gave as much attention to dreams as some of us do to corporate accounts. We should be careful not to ridicule their beliefs or methods as we may find they bear strong similarities to our own.

Today, most people will say they don't believe in God as an old man with a beard. Maybe not many ever did, but it was an easy way of imagining God. The loss of belief in that kind of imaginary deity is a result of a long process of secularization. In 1500, almost no one questioned "belief" in God. Today most tend to say "I am spiritual, not religious" and write "none" in the religion box on forms. As Charles Taylor showed, secularization is not the antithesis or rejection of religion; nor is it the mere result of the "subtraction" of religious customs and beliefs from a culture. It is the change from religious belief being a taking-for-granted default setting to being a personal choice.

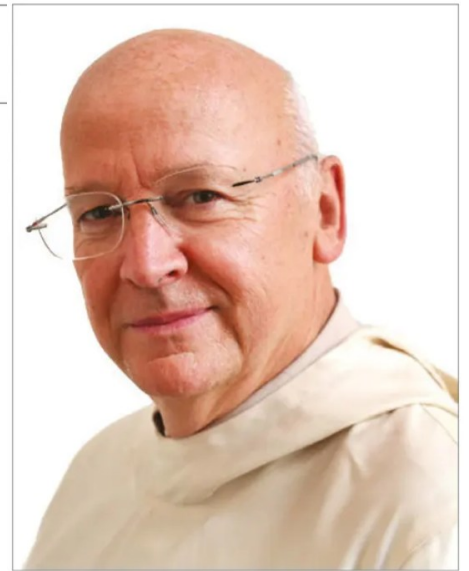
Blame Jesus, as did the Grand Inquisitor, for starting this process. Jesus called himself the "Lord of the Sabbath". Even more mischievously, he taught prayer not as controlling the gods or as petitioning the old man in the sky but as an encounter in the heart which transforms the person praying (Matthew 6:7). He marginalised the rituals and public aspect of religion to allow the true nature of our experience of God to flourish and transform us through radical metanoia. He was a religious person but, firstly, a spiritual one.

Not surprisingly, most of Jesus' disciples struggled to disengage from their old religiosity even as they preached the revolution he began. St Paul berated the foolish Galatians for regressing to superstition and abandoning the liberty of spirit they had briefly tasted.

Who can we blame now for the acceleration of secularization, which is bringing a catastrophic decline in church attendance to western countries? Of course, it's the Holy Spirit, who coordinated many of the causes of secularization. Reform movements within Christianity from the tenth century peaked in the sixteenth-century Reformation, and many of the reforms they demanded were adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century.

In these multiple causes we can glimpse the future of religion. The elitism of clerical life yields to the sanctification of ordinary life. Hierarchy falls from its pedestals. The separation of the zones of sacred and profane dissolves. The world's mysteries are explained by science and lose their enchantment. Relics no longer penetrate the veil. Religion is meaningless when it loses touch with what is deemed authentic, and authenticity is now searched for in personal experience, not in shared authority. In a secular age, we have the choice to be religious or not. The politicizing of religion, evident on a large scale in the US and Russia, highlights the risks of choice. Yet the choices we are free to make are always fragile and uncertain. The hunger for transcendence, for what connects us beyond this immanent world to something more fulfilling, exposes our spiritual malnutrition. What Taylor calls the "malaise of modernity" has left many with religious freedom but not with liberty of spirit. Life feels purposeless: we have lost touch with the heroic quest and settle for the supermarket of technological consumerism.

We have reached the end of "nominal Christianity". We are seeing the same shift in other religious cultures. In India recently, I witnessed an energized debate about religious belief among 5,000 Buddhist monks.



Laurence Freeman

They came from just two large Buddhist monasteries - there are barely 6,000 Benedictine monks worldwide. Yet, I was told, the new intake into the Buddhist monasteries is plummeting. Everyone feels they are "searching". The old forms of religious belief are over. In the future it will be less about *what* we believe than *how* we believe.

The future appears even as the past struggles to survive. In 1975 John Main, the English Benedictine monk whose centenary we celebrate this year, opened the first Christian Meditation Centre at Ealing Abbey in west London. It led to a global spiritual family, ecumenical, multicultural, decentralized, yet united in a simple daily contemplative practice and open to dialogue with contemplatives of other faiths. Not a new Church, but a new way of integrating religion and spirituality.

The old is not coming back. I doubt the worship of the new Baals of algorithms and artificial intelligence will replace the search for "spirit and truth". The religion of the future should be something different: an education of the heart, reviving the symbolic imagination to enable us to read Scriptures wisely. The search will be communal, not the task of isolated individuals. God-centred prayer will be rediscovered and reconnect us to the "Spirit of the One who created the universe, lives in the human heart and in silence is loving to all".

The signs of the times are of disintegration and collapse, but reading them correctly gives us reason to hope that the contemplative revolution that Jesus launched is entering a new phase.

Laurence Freeman OSB is a Benedictine monk of the Olivetan Congregation and director of the World Community for Christian Meditation. His latest book, *Tasting Wisdom: A Daily Companion for Meditation*, is published by Canterbury Press.

Risen Christ Parish - Sacramental Program 2026

Sacrament of Reconciliation

- *Reconciliation Parent Faith Formation Evening*
will be held at 7pm on **Monday 9th February**
at St Francis Xavier Catholic Church (88 Mayona Road, Montmorency)

Communal Rite of Forgiveness

will be held at
7pm on **Monday 23rd March**
at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church (2 Henry Street, Eltham)
for HT students, OLHC students and parishioners
and
7pm on **Tuesday 24th March**
at St Francis Xavier Catholic Church (88 Mayona Road, Montmorency)
for SFX students and parishioners



Sacrament of First Eucharist

- *First Eucharist Parent Faith Formation Evening*
will be held at 7pm on **Monday 27th April**
at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church (2 Henry Street, Eltham)

First Eucharist Student Retreat Day

Thursday 30th April
more information to follow.

The Sacrament of First Eucharist is offered to candidates at each of the 3
weekend Masses
(6pm Sat SFX, 8:30am Sun SFX, 10am Sun OLHC)
from **Saturday 6th June until Sunday 11th October**
The Booking Process will be discussed at the First Eucharist Parent Faith
Formation evening.



Sacrament of Confirmation

- *Confirmation Parent Faith Formation Evening*
will be held at 7pm on **Monday 10th August**
at St Francis Xavier Catholic Church (88 Mayona Road, Montmorency)

Confirmation Rehearsal
will be held from 10am to 2pm on **Tuesday 6th October**
at Catholic Ladies College Hall (19 Diamond Street, Eltham)

Confirmation

will be held at 2:30pm on **Sunday 11th October**
at Catholic Ladies College Hall (19 Diamond Street, Eltham)



Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, please contact Fr Michael at the Parish office on 9435 4742, otherwise questions will be answered at the Faith Formation Evenings. We look forward to working with and supporting you as you lead your child more fully into their faith journey in our parish community.
Blessings to all.

Michael F. Sierakowski
Parish Moderator
risenchrist.parish@cam.org.au

Kathy Toomey
Holy Trinity
kttoomey@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Megan Bird
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Rudy Vail
Our Lady Help of Christians
rudy.vail@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

In search of the one true Valentine

Over-priced roses and boxes of chocolates located near checkouts can only mean one thing: a certain saint's day is approaching. But, historically speaking, it is not entirely clear which saint / **By Michael Carter**

Its association with love, romance, and, let's be honest, sex, ensures that 14 February is one of only a handful of saints' feast days most of us can immediately identify. But there's actually precious little about the historical St Valentine to justify a connection with amorous couples, or much evidence to support the suggestion that today's romantic associations have their origins in an ancient Roman fertility cult. And the assertion that St Valentine made the ultimate sacrifice in defence of Christian marriage, and so is a fitting patron for protectors of the institution from its ungodly, liberal enemies, also crumbles when exposed to historical scrutiny (pictured below, a Croatian painting of the saint).

Indeed, other than that he was martyred in the late third century, little is known about the historical Valentine. Or should that be Valentines? Leaving to one side the St Valentine of Passau, a fifth-century bishop whose holy day falls on 7 January, and the other St Valentines whose feasts pepper liturgical calendars, no fewer than three martyrs called Valentine have a feast on 14 February. The first was put to death together with 24 of his military companions in Roman Africa. The others were martyred in or near Rome in c.270 and have a better claim to be the saint inadvertently venerated by the amorous and lustful. One was a priest executed and buried outside the city walls on the Flaminian Way (a major highway leading from the Eternal City), the second a bishop of Terni, a small city 60 or so miles north east of Rome.

The Roman Church initially tried to hedge its bets, giving both Valentines a feast on 14 February. This didn't cut it with the Bollandists, scholarly Belgian Jesuits who have been tussling with the finer points of hagiography since the early seventeenth century. They concluded that these two Valentines were in fact one and the same. Evidence for veneration of St Valentine dates to within living memory of his martyrdom. As early as the pontificate of Pope Julius I (337-352), a major church was built above his tomb near the Flaminian Way. The saint's name is inscribed in the Martyrology of St Jerome, a list of martyrs most likely dating back to the late fifth century. Devotion to St Valentine spread across Western Europe, reaching England no later than the eighth century. His feast was celebrated in

churches great and small, though if liturgical calendars are anything to go by, confusion about Valentine's precise identity persisted until the eve of the Reformation. Sometimes he was a priest, other times a bishop; as late as 1500, Battle Abbey celebrated the feasts of two Valentines on 14 February.

St Valentine's cult remained firmly rooted in Rome. The suburban basilica bearing his name and housing his relics was part of the early medieval pilgrim itinerary. In the mid-thirteenth century, his remains were translated to the basilica of St Praxedes. His skull was later removed and now rests, crowned with flowers, in the basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, though bits of this, indeed alternative entire skulls, are also claimed by other churches. Relics of St Valentine also reached England, including the medieval royal chapel of St George, Windsor. In 1836 a reliquary containing his remains was carried with great solemnity to the Dublin church of the Carmelites in Whitefriar Street. They went into storage for several years, until a new altar and shrine was constructed to house them in the 1960s. At Mass celebrated there today, couples from around the world will renew their marriage vows.

Valentine is also known as the patron saint of beekeeping, and of people with epilepsy: nothing to do with the historical Valentine, rather a pun on the German pronunciation of his name, epilepsy being known as the "falling disease". There are depictions of Valentine in late medieval devotional books with people lying prostrate at his feet. Why did St Valentine and his feast become associated with love and romance? Claims that he performed secret Christian marriages in defiance of a ban on marriage imposed by the Emperor Claudius II "Gothicus" (268-70) are without any historical foundation. Nor is there a shred of evidence to support assertions that he cut heart-shaped holes into parchments to remind Roman soldiers of the Christian duty or that he acted as a messenger for imprisoned Christian couples.

The claim that the amorous associations of his feast have their origins in the Lupercalia, an ancient Roman fertility cult observed in mid-February, is built on equally shaky historical foundations.

According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, its celebration included "odd rites". Two youths, naked except for loin-cloths, ran around the Palatine Hill, one of ancient Rome's seven hills, striking bystanders, especially young women, with goat-skin thongs, or *februa*. Pregnant women thought this would result in the birth of a healthy child. Pope Gelasius suppressed the cult at the end of the fifth century, and some suggest its romantic overtones were transferred to St Valentine's Day. That's an open question at best.

Perhaps the connection between St Valentine's Day and love is down to the general friskiness brought about by the lengthening days and the first signs of spring. According to a tradition going back to at least the late fourteenth century, 14 February was a day for love birds. In his poem "The Parliament of Fowls" Geoffrey Chaucer wrote that "Seynt Valentynes day"



is the day "whan every foul cometh ther to chese his make" ("when every bird come to choose his mate"). Humans emulated their feathered friends. John Lydgate, a fifteenth-century monk at Bury St Edmunds, observed that on St Valentine's Day it was the custom of Englishmen "To look and search Cupid's calendar/And choose their choice with great affection". The first "Valentine" in English was sent in February 1477 by Margery Brewes, who affectionately called her fiancé John Paston "my right well-beloved valentine". The custom was maintained into the early sixteenth century, Sir Henry Willoughby, a Warwickshire gent, bestowing cash gifts on his "Valentine". Counter-Reformation Catholicism placed great emphasis on early Roman saints who had died for their faith and veneration of St Valentine prospered in Catholic countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But his feast day was purged from the calendar of the Protestant Church of England, the purported pagan associations catnip to Godly firebrands who stood ever-ready to sniff out and denounce supposed papist idolatry.

The specialness of the day for courting couples proved more resilient. Written greetings gained in popularity in the eighteenth century and in the post-war consumer boom St Valentine's Day became a cash cow for florists, confectioners and restaurateurs. Whether or not true love needs these tacky celebrations, they help ensure that the feast of one early Roman martyr (or perhaps more) remains firmly entrenched in the modern, secular calendar.

Michael Carter is a historian and art historian who specialises in monasticism.