

The Connection Between Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday

As we approach both Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday, it can be asked, is there a connection between these two events?

While both holidays are about drastically different events, they do have some fascinating intersections and differences.

Both holidays are recognized by those of the Catholic faith.

Valentine's Day is known for its name after St. Valentine, who it is believed may actually have been multiple different people, according to . However, the act of heroism that St. Valentine is most acknowledged and celebrated for is secretly marrying couples during a time when Emperor Claudius II outlawed marriage in order to make men better soldiers.

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On the flip side, the Catholic faith recognizes Ash Wednesday as the start of Lent. This time of fasting and prayer leads up to holy week when Christians all over the world celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ.

One has roots in paganism.

The roots to Valentine's Day are not simply the surface level feel-good motives of St. Valentine himself. In fact, it is believed to go as far back as the Roman festival of Lupercalia, which celebrated fertility with animal sacrifices, matchmaking and the whipping of women believed to make them more fertile. While modern-day Christianity and culture have altered the meaning for Valentine's Day from these ancient

backings, it is interesting to think that such seemingly ferocious ceremonies brought us the day that most people around the world recognize as a day about love.

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Both holidays make us reflect on what it means to love and to be loved.

Valentine's Day centers itself on romantic relationships while Ash Wednesday focuses on the reflection of the ultimate love and sacrifice God gave us through His only Son on the cross. Having these two holidays intersect at the same time, while very different with different beginnings, can offer each person a time to reflect on what it truly means to love others and to be loved.

In 1 Corinthians 13, believers are called to abide in "faith, hope and love," but that the "greatest of these is love." If we take a look at how Christ loved, how abundantly and freely He gave of Himself to us when we were not deserving of it, we can easily see that love as it is portrayed by media and society today pales in comparison with the richness and fullness of a love rooted in Christ. By looking at Jesus' humble heart, we are to treat one another with this kind of patient and loyal love that extends beyond mere chocolates and cards and seeks to captivate the heart with goodness, mercy and grace. {eo}

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