

WHO EXACTLY WAS ST. VALENTINE?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the identity of St. Valentine:

The first thing to know about St. Valentine is that he is no longer recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. A martyr, yes, but a saint, no.

He was canonized in 496 AD, over 200 years after he died, which was sometime around 270 AD and 280 AD. In 1969, Pope Paul VI removed him from the General Roman Calendar, concluding that there wasn't enough reliable evidence to maintain his sainthood.

There are different historical accounts of St. Valentine. According to one legend, he was a priest in Rome who was martyred during the Christian persecution; he was beheaded under the reign of Emperor Claudius II for defying his orders.

The Emperor wanted single men to fight his wars, knowing they would be less distracted with family duties. Fr. Valentine, wanting to subvert his efforts, continued to perform marriage ceremonies so the husbands wouldn't have to go to war. Allegedly, it was his refusal to deny Christ that was the final straw.

Another story says he was beheaded under Claudius II when he became a bishop. Others say that Valentine the priest and Valentine the bishop were two different persons.

It was Chaucer, the English poet, who first declared St. Valentine's Day a day of romantic celebration. He did so in a 1375 poem. In other words, Valentine's celebrations extend as far back as the Middle Ages. It was another poet, Charles, Duke of Orleans, who is responsible for the first "modern"

valentine—he extended it to his wife while in prison in 1415.

The first valentine was supposedly sent by Valentine himself. He fell in love with the daughter of the man who jailed him—she liked to visit him in jail. It is said that on the day of his execution he wrote her a letter, signed, appropriately, “Your Valentine.”

No one doubts that Valentine was a priest and a martyr. It is apropos to note his martyrdom today because Christian martyrdom is raging out of control.

Open Doors does a great job tracking Christian persecution worldwide; it is known for its accuracy and its conservative estimates.

Its 2023 World Watch List details 50 countries where Christian persecution is the worst. “Last year,” its report said, “for the first time in 29 years of tracking, all 50 nations scored high enough to register ‘very high’ persecution levels on Open Doors’ 84-question matrix.”

Here are some of its other findings:

- A thousand more Christians were killed for their faith last year than the year before
- A thousand more Christians were detained
- Six hundred more churches were attacked or closed

No place on earth is it “harder to follow Jesus” than in Afghanistan. It replaced North Korea from the top spot. Somalia ranked third worst.

The most violent nations for Christians to live in are, from top to bottom, Nigeria, Pakistan and India. Nigeria and Pakistan are also one-two in countries where the most Christians were martyred. When it comes to churches being attacked or closed, China and Nigeria lead the way.

The biggest threat to Christians, the study found, is coming

from Islamic extremists.

This is sobering news. But it is not healthy to live in darkness, so to all of those who are going to celebrate St. Valentine's Day—have a good time! Fr. Valentine, saint or no, wouldn't have wanted it any other way.