

Agnus Dei
(Chapman: *Primitif*)
For people of a certain, mostly young, age, and of at least a vaguely Christian cultural background or milieu, it's presumably not necessary to say that this is St Valentine's Day — whereas he might have been. Our English-language newspapers, at least, (or perhaps it's their advertisers) always seem to splurge much more on St Valentine's Day than on any other saint's day. Truth is, nobody knows now how the courtship rites associated with the 14th February got identified with St Valentine, except for the coincidence of calendar dates — and tho' there were a couple of Valentines who were martyrs of the early church, they are very shadowy figures, lost (really) in the tangle of legend and mistaken identities. And yet, there is a lot to be said for keeping the customs that have grown around today's date. For one thing, in such a throw-away society as ours, where marriage too has become for many people a casual, throw-away affair, it's good to know that some ideals do remain, and that courtship can be meaningful and beautiful. Maybe not too many devotees of St Valentine's Day give any thought to the men, or the men — the fact that they were martyrs, who gave the completest gift that anyone could give, their very lives, in love for Christ their Lord. Adults may sometimes be a bit cynical about the romances of youth: but today, especially if you know some young people, perhaps even in your own family, for whom St Valentine's Day does seem to mean something, then why not pray for them — a prayer that they may also find something of the devotion and dedication of a Christian martyr in their lives, that the tokens of affection given and received may become much more than tokens, that they may find in their lives real, unselfish, self-giving love for their friends, their family, their fellowmen, and for God. || It is a happy coincidence too, to have today in the same week as the St Valentine's Day so close to the

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~~Chinese~~ ^{Latin} New Year, which is so much a family festival and celebration, with its own tokens of love and respect. But they say these ties and customs are also showing signs of breaking down — all the more reason, perhaps, for keeping St Valentine in his place in popular legend and custom, even if he no longer has a place in the calendar of the Christian church's list of saint's days. For today has been pre-empted [in the new universal church calendar] by two men who are much more historical, and important in the history of the church and of their adopted countries. Febr. 14th was the day on which, in the year 869, St Cyril died in Rome: and with his brother Methodius, who died on 6th Apr in 885 in what's now Czechoslovakia, Cyril left his mark on the whole of Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries. There still today they are honoured as national figures, if not publicly as saints. Born in Greece, the two brothers had distinguished careers before becoming priests, and being sent to preach the gospel in Moravia — Cyril taught with distinction at the imperial university at Constantinople, and Methodius was governor of a province. Both knew the Slavonic language well, which greatly helped their missionary work: and it was Cyril who first worked out an alphabet in which Slavonic could be written down, and so laid the foundations of Slavonic literature. It also made it possible for them to translate much of the Bible, and the liturgy of the church for general use. The so-called Cyrillic alphabet which is still used in Russian, is called after St Cyril: though that may have been the work of his followers in Bulgaria. For today, ^{then let's also remember} ~~incidentally~~ in prayer the people of those countries where Cyril & Methodius worked, ^{the Valentine's Day saints} [some music from a Mass in their language, the Glagolitic Mass of the modern composer Javorka — this is the Kyrie, Lord Have Mercy

St Cyril - St Methodius
were your instruments, Lord, in bringing the light of the gospel to the Slavonic peoples. May we take your word into our hearts, and be at one in profession of true faith.

MUSIC - PRAYERS

To conclude today, from the Slavonic 'Life of Constantine': "Worn out by his many labours, Constantine Cyril fell ill. After many days of sickness, he had a kind of divine vision and began to chant this phrase: 'My spirit was glad and my heart rejoiced when I heard them say 'we will go into the house of God.'... When the time had come for him to take his rest and to leave this world for his heavenly home, he raised his hands to God and prayed with tears: O Lord my God, you have created all the angelic ranks and spiritual powers. You have spread out the heavens and made firm the earth, bringing into existence from nothing all that exists. You always hear the prayers of those who do your will, who revere you and keep your commandments. Hear my prayer and keep safe your faithful flock over which you set me, your foolish and unworthy servant. Free your people from the impious malice of those unbelievers who blaspheme against you. Make your church grow in number, and gather all its members into unity. Make them a chosen people, of one mind in your true faith and in orthodox profession of it: breathe the word of your teaching into their hearts. For it is a gracious favour from you that you have accepted us to preach the gospel of your Christ by encouraging people to do good works and by doing what pleases you. I return to you as your own those whom you gave me. Rule them with your right hand: keep them under the shadow of your wings, that they all may praise and glorify your name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen". Then he kissed them all with a holy kiss... and so he fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 42. The Pope ordered that all the Greeks present in Rome, and the Romans, should gather carrying candles to chant over his body: his funeral was to be conducted in every respect as though he had been the Pope himself, and this they did. St Cyril and Methodius, the Valentine's Day Saints.