

## **Speaking Notes at the Shrine of St. Valentine - 13.02.26**

Welcome to all of you, and especially Lauren and David, who have come here to have their engagement ring blessed. I welcome the Executive Director of Accord CLG based in Maynooth but operating in all dioceses in Republic outside of Dublin, Tony Shanahan and the Chief Executive Officer of Relationship Care, here in Dublin, Jennifer Griffin.

We are here at the relics associated with Saint Valentine. Relics always are a source of interest. They capture the imagination.

What is the relic of? Is it authentic? When and how did the relic come here? And who is this Saint Valentine in any case?

Beside me this reliquary contains some of the remains of Saint Valentine; it was never claimed that all his remains are here. The reliquary also holds a small vessel tinged with the blood of the martyr, all contained in a sealed wooden box. This box is in the casket that can be seen beneath this altar. We are standing on holy ground, rubbing shoulders with a third century saint.

On this the eve of Saint Valentine's Day, which a recent AIB survey reminds us is the peak day for spending, particularly for florists. When we walk into shops and convenience stores we are confronted with all things Valentine. Red is very much the colour of cards and gifts. Our Christian tradition holds the colour red is also a recognition of the martyrdom of this man, Valentine, who was killed for this faith on 14 February, 269AD.

But today we remember that God is love. And in that context I am also delighted to announce the increase, last year, in the number of couples attending our Accord Marriage Preparation Programme and, moreover, that this increasing trend has continued throughout the first month of 2026.

I am very grateful for the work of our Accord facilitators who present these programmes.

In addition to the Accord data, and I also welcome today, as encouraging and good news, the Amárach Research carried out last August, commissioned by Accord, on the future intentions of many young people to marry in Church.

In the Amárach Research it is great to see how faith and belief play as a motivator for young couples deciding to celebrate one's wedding in a Catholic church. The future is bright indeed.

Our Church is at the service of its community at all times. Priests and parishes comment on the marked decline in the number of couples celebrating sacramental marriage. While our Church is a Church of welcome, undoubtedly more work needs to be done to encourage and support couples to appreciate the beauty that is sacramental marriage.

Saint Valentine's Shrine is not just holy ground because it contains a casket of relics associated with a third century martyr, Saint Valentine, but also because of the many couples – and indeed generations of Irish families and visiting tourists - who have call here to this sanctuary in the midst of the hustle and bustle of our historic capital, to light a candle, to write a petition, to simply stand and pray.

These pilgrims, including couples like Lauren and David today, make this a holy place, and we are grateful for your fidelity and love.

In November 1836 the reliquary was first brought to this church, that's 190 years ago, 190 years of standing here on holy ground. Today and forever this shrine serves as a beacon to the Christian virtues of faith, love and hope, which Saint Paul writes about in the New Testament, reminding us, of course, that the greatest of these is love.

I continue now with the blessing ...