



— *Faith and food* —

THE CORPORAL NOURISHMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN



St. Teresa of Jesus once said that *Our Lord Moves Amidst The Pots And Pans, helping us both in the inside and the outside*. It's clear that a mystic of her stature could not separate practical life from the interior life. As she affirms in her book *The Interior Castle: My daughters, this is the point of prayer, and of this spiritual marriage, to give birth to works*.

In the Christian life, and especially in the conventual life there are three elements that cannot be separated: prayer, work, and nourishment. We can see this aspect clearly in the design of the monasteries used by the various orders of the Catholic Church, which contain cells for intimacy, a Chapel or Oratory, a dining hall, and different work areas. Like a house, every space in a monastery has its own rules, but never in a vacuum, separated from the whole. There is always a sense of totality that articulates the monastery and gives every room its place. We cannot pray the Divine Office in the conventual kitchen, in the same way that we don't sleep in the kitchens of our own house.

Our view of the domestic life, thanks to evangelization, was greatly inspired by monasteries. It is interesting to analyze how much life changed in the American Continent thanks to individuals like Vasco de Quiroga, or the work of Priests belonging to the Company of Jesus (Jesuits), who established spaces known as *reducciones* in South America. *Reducciones* were a type of mission that housed indigenous people who converted to Christianity, living in accord with the rule used by the evangelizing order. A lifestyle very close to the one accustomed by the missionaries.

This lifestyle has transcended to our days, to the point of using a clock to structure our daily lives, for example. It is important to point out that the clock is one of the most important elements of monastic life. In the seventh century, Pope Sabinian established, inspired by the rule of St. Benedict, the custom of ringing the monastery bells seven times a day, to mark the canonic times for the Divine Office.

While our modern houses may not have bells to ring seven times a day, we tend to follow a rigorous schedule marked by different alarms on our clocks.

Following the very rigorous scheduling of monastic life, it's inevitable to conclude that food is intimately linked to the way we profess our faith, and that it should conform to the Gospel. It is for this reason that the types of food consumed in a monastery change according to the season and the Liturgical Calendar. This is especially true for mendicant orders of strict observance, where we can find both rigorous fasting and feasting.

These ideas have to be considered within a concept of evangelization, that not only teaches Christian doctrine, but can also change reality. Like Cardinal Sarah said: *When Jesus enters a life, He transfigures it, He divinizes it with the dazzling light of His Face.*

Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún narrated how the indigenous people of what is now Mexico used to sacrifice men, women, and children in the feast day dedicated to the gods *Xippetotec* and *Huitzilopochtli*. The bodies of these individuals were dismembered and distributed as food. The *Tlatoani Moctezuma* would eat a thigh, while the rest of the body would be given to the households of those who captured them. Their meat would be cooked in a corn stew named *tlacatloalli*. It is interesting to note that, according to Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, that practice could be directly attributed to satan, since he could perceive the painful tears cried by the parents of those who were sacrificed in such a fashion.

It is clear that such a practice had to be eradicated. For this reason, the Church substituted the human flesh found in the *tlacatloalli* dish for pork meat, which has a similar flavor. By this action, the ritual sacrifices were made obsolete, and transformed the *tlacatloalli* into a popular dish, known today as *Pozole*. What once was a bloody human sacrifice for the elect, was turned into a true Christian meal, meant to be consumed by the community.

We can then assure then, that indigenous food was changed by The Gospel in a true process of inculturation, that assumed the reality of the territory and transformed it in accordance to Christian life. The Gospel has to be present in every aspect of our lives, and especially in food.

St. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that our spiritual life has a certain likeness with our corporal life. It is fundamental to follow his words since many vices and sins are manifested through what we eat. It is obvious that eating human flesh is a barbaric act, but it is not so different to the disordered eating found in gluttony, or in the rejection of the fasting and abstinence demanded by the Church.

Christians manifest their faith and virtue in their way of eating. It is not only important to follow the penitential laws of the Church, but to truly thank the generous hand of God, Who provides the food we eat every day.

Dominican Friars have a custom of serving food to the youngest first, based on the miraculous prayer of St. Dominic. One day, while he was in Rome, his friars could only get a single piece of bread to eat. While they were on their way back to the monastery, a poor man asked for food and they gave it to him, leaving them empty-handed. When the friars arrived, they told what happened to St. Dominic, who ordered them to proceed to the dining hall as normal. Right before eating, St. Dominic immersed himself in prayer and two unknown men appeared carrying bread, which they served from the youngest to the eldest.

While our prayer is capable of uniting us to God, what we eat truly communicates that union. That was the driving force behind the cooking of St. Teresa of Jesus, who expressed her gratitude with every one of her recipes. In commemoration of her life, and in aims to achieve a better sense of Christian eating, we provide the traditional recipe known as *Carmelite Stew*.

Ingredients:

- 500 gr. chickpeas
- 250 gr. crumbled cod
- 2 onions
- 300 gr. spinach
- 3 eggs
- 40 gr. flour
- 1250 ml. water
- 500 millilitres. olive oil
- Salt
- 3 cloves
- 2 bay leaves
- Saffron
- Parsley

Preparation:

Soak the chickpeas in water for 24 hours. Put them on the fire with parsley, the laurel, an onion, the cloves, some salt and a dash of oil in a pot with plenty of water. Cover the pot with the lid and let the chickpeas simmer until they are done.

Cut the second onion in small pieces and poach them in a pan with some oil.

Boil the eggs in boiling water for 15 minutes, then separate the egg whites and yolks.

Mash the yolks of the boiled eggs, 50 gr. of boiled chickpeas and some of the broth. Crush them and put everything in the pot. Cook for 15 minutes longer.

At the last moment, add the finely chopped egg whites. Blanch the spinach, form small balls, toss in flour and fry in a pan with plenty of oil over medium heat. Mix the cod with some saffron threads and fry it in a pan over a low heat with lots of oil.

Serve the chickpeas with the cod and the fried spinach balls on the plate.

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