

From the Kitchen of Fr. Gary ...

I fell in love with panforte when I spent a summer in Siena, Italy. It is the traditional Sienese Christmas dessert - their version of fruit cake. It is chewy, spicy and delicious. Some years I buy it online, but every other year or so I make it at home. A few years ago I even candied my own lemon and orange peel. I thought I had made enough for a second batch of cakes, then, Fr. Dan Parrish stopped by my room. The next day, I had to run to the store again! This is the best recipe that I have found.

Panforte di Siena

Bread Crumb Pan Lining:

- 1 tablespoon cake flour
- 2 tablespoons ground almonds or hazelnuts (your choice)
- 1 tablespoon fine bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 300° F and adjust oven rack to center position. Brush an 8-inch cake pan or an 8-inch Spring form Pan with butter. Cut a dish of parchment paper to fit pan bottom. Brush paper with butter and fit into pan bottom. In a small bowl, combine cake flour, bread crumbs, and almonds or hazelnuts; evenly scatter over sides and bottom. Pat gently into place.

Cake:

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| 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons cake flour, divided | 1/2 cup granulated sugar |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided | 1/2 cup candied citron or candied melon, cut into small pieces |
| 1/4 teaspoon ground coriander | 1/2 cup candied orange peel, cut into small pieces |
| 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves | 1 cup almonds or hazelnuts, toasted and coarsely chopped** |
| 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg | Powdered (confectioner's sugar) sugar |
| 1/2 cup honey | |

*** To toast nuts, preheat oven to 350° F. Place nuts in a single layer in an ungreased shallow pan or rimmed baking sheet. Bake 5 to 10 minutes, stirring once or twice during toasting to aid in even browning, or until they are golden brown. Remove from oven and remove from pan; let cool. If using hazelnuts, remove from pan; place hazelnuts in a clean terry-cloth towel and wrap it closed. Let the nuts steam for 4 to 5 minutes then rub vigorously for 1 to 3 minutes on a hard surface to remove skins; discard skins.*

In a small bowl, combine 1/2 cup cake flour, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, coriander, cloves, and nutmeg; set aside. In another small bowl, combine the remaining 2 tablespoons of cake flour and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon; set mixture aside and save for the top.

In a medium saucepan over low heat, combine honey and sugar. Cook, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching, until mixture comes to a full boil; remove from heat. Stir in candied fruit and almonds or hazelnuts. Sift in flour mixture; stir until well blended. Pour batter into prepared pan. Smooth top with the slightly wet palm of your hand. Sift reserved cinnamon-flour mixture over the top. Place cake in center of middle oven rack. Bake 30 minute or until panforte just starts to simmer around edge of pan. Remove from oven; cool completely on a wire rack.

Loosen from pan by running a small knife around perimeter. Invert onto a wire rack, letting excess cinnamon flour fall away. Use knife to peel away parchment or rice paper. Invert panforte again and transfer onto a wire rack. Dust top with powdered sugar. When cool, it can be wrapped in several layers of plastic wrap and a layer of aluminum foil and stored in an airtight container for several weeks, or frozen for up to six months. Serve at room temperature. Before serving, dust lightly with additional powdered sugar. Cut into small wedges to serve. Makes 16 servings.

CROSS LINKS

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Dear friends,

I may not be the best one to be writing to you during the holidays. I must admit, I have never really liked Christmas, even as a kid. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy a good present or two, but the season is thick with pressures about family, gift giving, traveling, and unstated expectations. All of this comes on the heels of my favorite holiday, Thanksgiving, which is also about family and traveling and unstated expectations. However, it is just about sharing a big meal with people you love (or at least those you have found to be with that day) and we haven't messed it up yet. In between these two poles is my favorite season of the year - Advent - watchful preparation that focuses on the three comings of Christ. We prepare for our celebration of his coming in the manger long ago as we prepare our hearts for his coming again in glory at the end of time. All the while, we prepare our hearts to welcome him into our lives today. We invite him to form us more completely into his image and to use us to speak his word and to be his healing touch. My celebrations of Advent have helped me to embrace the fullness of Christmas over the years and to welcome the gift of Christ in our world. I hope you enjoy Thanksgiving and enter into the Advent season in hopeful anticipation.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

If there are specific individuals (living or dead) you would like us to remember during this Christmas season, or specific intentions, jot them down on the enclosed prayer slip and send it back to us.

No offering is required, but any offering given will support the apostolic priorities of Holy Cross.

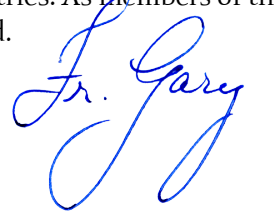
This season is all tied up with family and we should all take time to give thanks for them. Petty squabbles and sibling rivalries pale in comparison to the gift of love in which so many of us have been nurtured and thrived. Take time to ponder the sacrifices of your parents and the fun, and protection, and friendship that grew among your brothers and sisters. Most of us grew up in a "school of love" that takes the Holy Family in Nazareth as its model and for that we should give thanks. As we reflect on the blessings we have been given, remember also those for whom family was not a particular blessing or gift. The holidays can be a difficult time for them. May they be in our prayers and have seats at our tables. For though blood is thick, the water of baptism is thicker and we are all beloved children of God.

The family of Holy Cross has recently lost several members and we ask your prayers for the repose of their souls. **Br. Louis F. Hurcik, C.S.C.**, (September 23) was known by generations of Notre Dame students as the brother who taught them to swim. Brother spent 38 years teaching swimming, lifesaving and first aid and was an important part of the American Red Cross in St. Joseph County for over 50 years. **Rev. Rudolph V. Carchidi, C.S.C.**, (September 24) passed away the day after Br. Lou. Rudy taught high school for many years before spending 23 years teaching mathematics at Stonehill College. He retired from teaching at the age of 87. Wow!

Rev. James J. McGrath, C.S.C., (October 24) was the "keeper of the plants" in the Notre Dame greenhouse and taught botany there for nearly 40 years. **Rev. Joseph Browne, C.S.C.**, (October 30) was the longtime Director of the Library at the University of Portland. After retirement, he was pastor of St. Birgitta Parish in Portland for ten years.

In this season of giving, please remember Holy Cross as you can. Your gifts defray the cost of educating over 100 men of the province in formation around the world and keeps a roof over their heads and clothes on their backs. They also help educate the next generation of scholars to teach in our classrooms or serve our other ministries. As members of the Holy Cross family, you are essential in our efforts to help others to know, love, and serve the Lord.

Merry Christmas!



CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE AGES

When it comes to deepening our understanding of Christmas, it may surprise you to know that you can't find Santa or the elves anywhere in the Bible. There are not even any flying reindeer in the Book of Revelation and that book has just about everything in it! Ditto for Christmas trees, yule logs, and fruit cakes; scripturally nada!

As we know, these aspects of Christmas are later cultural adaptations, though some might be surprised that much of the accumulation is of very recent vintage. Some elements of our "Christmas story" are distinctly American in origin and became integrated into our annual Christmas celebration during the 19th century.

Even the date of Christmas is shrouded in the mists of time. How did we land on December 25th? The gospels themselves shed little light on the actual date of Jesus' birth and the documents extant from the primitive Church exhibit no concern for the details of the nativity. That Jesus came into this world to bring salvation was considered important; when he was actually born was not.

By the 3rd century, attempts were made to date the important moments of salvation history. Tertullian calculated the date of Jesus' crucifixion as the 14 of Nisan which translates to March 25 in the Roman calendar. March 25 becomes the celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation - the day of Jesus' conception - a connection which yokes Christ's conception to the date of his death and marks it as both the day he began his salvific work on earth and the one on which he brought it to completion. This correlation highlights the completeness and perfection of his earthy efforts.

Augustine affirms this reckoning in his 5th century work *On the Trinity*. "He is believed to have been conceived on the 25th of March, the day upon which he also suffered; so that the womb of the Virgin, in which he was conceived and where no other mortal was ever begotten, corresponds to the new grave in which he was buried, in which no man was ever laid, before or since. And according to tradition, he was born on the 25th of December." In the yoking of conception and death, all of creation and salvation is bound together in a unified display of God's providential grace. That Christ's conception and

death occurred in conjunction with the vernal equinox (when daylight begins to grow longer than night and light is said to triumph over darkness) and his birth occurred at the winter solstice (when darkness begins to recede before the growing light) was simply further proof of that grace.

To perpetuate the notion that Christmas is the Christianization of a pagan feast (whether the Roman festival of Saturnalia or feast of the Unconquered Sun) is unhistorical and does disservice to the celebration's rich and complex history while ignoring its roots in Jewish theological symbolism. Many cultures in the Mediterranean world and northern Europe had religious rituals and traditions surrounding the equinoxes and solstices and, in time, some of those came to influence our celebration of Christmas. However, the origins of the feast are clearly tied to early Christian attempts to understand and articulate who Christ was for us.

When Christianity spread north and west into Europe, it encountered a vast complex of peoples and traditions. The Germanic and Scandinavian peoples had belief systems and rituals that were closely tied to the seasons. The Druids were also deeply religious and sensitive to rhythms and cycles of the earth. As Christianity spread into these lands, many of their traditions were "Christianized" with Christmas in particular taking on many of the elements of their winter solstice celebrations.

The origin of the Christmas tree is lost to us, but decorated fir trees have been used in northern European winter celebrations for well over 1000 years. In some places, the lit trees were suspended upside down from the ceiling and in others they were stripped like May poles and placed in village squares. At the end of a day of celebration, they were then burned to provide warmth and light for the evening festivities. The tradition of the yule log also reflects various customs from around Europe. In some places, a whole tree was fed slowly into a fireplace across the twelve days of Christmas. Yikes!

Druids hung mistletoe in their homes to ward off evil and to bring good luck, while the plant symbolized love and friendship in Norse mythology. From there, it is but a short jump to kissing under the mistletoe. During the weeks of short days and

long dark nights, candles were used across Northern Europe to symbolize the people's longing for the return of the light. They were also necessary items in the aforementioned darkness.

In large celebrations, wagon wheels were decorated with evergreen branches and candles and hung in halls to bring beauty and light. The greenery of these wreaths came to symbolize eternal life and the unbroken line of their circle the eternalness of God himself. Devotion to St. Lucy, pictured wearing a crown of greenery surmounted by candles, also influenced the development of the Advent wreath and the use of wreaths during the Christmas season. Before the reform of the calendar, her feast (December 13) fell on the winter solstice and became an important celebration of light in Scandinavian countries.

While absorbing the signs and symbols of pre-Christian religious and cultural traditions, our celebration of Christmas remained faithful to its roots - to celebrate Christ's manifestation in our midst so as to dispel the darkness and bring light to the world.

Though German Protestants maintained the celebrations of Christmas after the Reformation, the puritan Oliver Cromwell suppressed its celebration in 17th century England, which impacted the American celebration of the feast into the 19th century. In those colonies dominated by the English, Christmas was not celebrated and was even forbidden at times. On Christmas Eve 1806, Manhattan's St. Peter's Church was surrounded by drunken journeyman butchers (you can't make this stuff up) outraged at the display of "popish superstition" being carried out inside - midnight Mass. In the melee that ensued, a policeman was killed. Though the incident seems more anti-Catholic than anti-Christmas, it highlights how much the lingering effects of English Puritanism still impacted the public celebration of Christmas at home and in its former colonies. Only when Princess Charlotte introduced the German celebration of Christmas to the court as wife of King George III, did England itself begin to soften on the issue.

In the 19th century, several events coalesced on both sides of the ocean that helped to reintroduce a robust celebration of feast in the English speaking world. In 1823, the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," was published here and it quickly began to crystalize

an American conception of St. Nicholas. The author's fanciful tale of the events of "The Night Before Christmas" wove bits of Norse mythology and other northern traditions into the life of the saint. Charles Dickens' 1843 *The Christmas Carol* rehabilitated Christmas in the English mind as a holiday emphasizing Christian compassion, family unity, and goodwill. America quickly fell in love with the story, as well. In 1862, Macy's in New York City introduced the first department store Santa establishing Christmas as an important retail holiday. Finally, Thomas Nast, popularized a version of this gift-giving Santa Claus (from Sinterklaas - a Norwegian corruption of Saint Nicholas) in cartoons for *Harper's Weekly* that began to standardize our image of the jolly old fella. Building on the 1823 poem, he used aspects from his own German mythic heritage alongside a generous helping of his own creative imagination. For nearly thirty years starting in 1862, Nast's drawings and accompanying prose developed a Santa Claus that we would recognize today. Christmas in America as we know it was created.

And so each year, we gather around yule logs and drink mulled wine or Coca-Cola (Santa's 20th century sponsor); we spend too much money on gifts no one needs to celebrate love, and family, and goodwill; we give great sums of money to charities and eat traditional foods, tell old stories (that may not in fact be very old) and light up trees both indoor and outside to brighten a darkened world. It is all wonderful, fabulous, mixed-up and more than a little crazy. And we do it all to celebrate the day that Christ was born into our world as one like us. We celebrate an infant lying in a manger, wholly aware of the rest of his story. We sing of his birth in carols that hint at the suffering and death to come; a death which opens the door for Easter. And our faith is always about Easter and eternal life.

So, rejoice this Christmas mindful of the nexus of Christ's conception and death and its intimate relationship with the celebration of his birth! Celebrate the God who so loved us that he sent his Son to lead us to eternal life! Be Christmas joy for one another!

Merry Christmas!