

Baltimore's crabbiest and 'best' crab cakes

By Father Leo Patalinghug

Maryland summers can bring out the crabbiest people – crab lovers, especially those defending their pick of “the best” crab cakes in town. To me, that would be an impossible task, so I won't even try. But if you want to pick a winner, I recommend an open mind, a sense of adventure and lots of prayers.

To start your own crab cake competition, aka mission impossible, begin with Faidley's Seafood at Lexington Market across the street from St. Jude Shrine, patron saint of impossible cases.

Extensive media coverage about Faidley's suggests this seafood market has some of the best crab cakes in town. A proud old-timer devotee even scolded me for considering using tartar sauce. He was right! The crab cake, broiled or fried, was creamy and moist. Buttery flavors, probably from the crushed saltine crackers and mayonnaise binder, highlighted the hints of sweet and savory tastes. City congestion, limited parking and store hours, and informal eating area can make it difficult for a family dining experience, but it may be worth calling ahead for carryout.

Mo's Seafood Restaurants offer Baltimore patrons multiple locations and venues, three of them within walking distance of Little Italy's St. Leo Church where I sought extra grace in my quest. The convenience and fair prices make for a delicious, stress-free and more affordable family dinner. This crab recipe had a unique smoky taste, perhaps paprika or aromas from a well-used oven. My particular crab cake was a mixture of lump and back fin, but unfortunately also a few shells. It was tasty, but I used the tartar sauce to enhance the flavors and texture.

Finally, the Internet buzzes about the crab cakes at the Linthicum-area G&M Restaurant. This restaurant and carryout is near BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport –

obviously not a church, but a place where a lot of people pray nonetheless.

G&M's crab cakes were huge - softball sized! This had the most detectable, sweet lump meat, least filler, retaining a delicious hint of the natural roe. And these crab cakes are broiled - never fried.

For me, choosing the best crab cakes balances subjective and objective realities. Some prefer jumbo lump, others enjoy rustic flavors of back fin or a combination of both. Too much filler or breading dries the texture and masks the natural flavor. Experienced cooks know that back-fin cakes can taste better fried, while delicate lump meat fares better when broiled with drizzled butter. The seasoning is as diverse as the eaters. Objectively, Maryland crab cakes must incorporate only fresh meat, use little filler, picked free from sharp shells, and must absolutely integrate traditional Chesapeake Bay flavors from Old Bay seasoning!

Crab-cake recipes can be like our expression of faith. There will always be some subjective differences. But at the end of the day, we ask if our faith is fresh, free from fluff or the sharpness of sin, and deeply integrates our traditional Catholic "flavor?"

We may not be able to easily determine the "best" crab cakes in town, but prayer can help make this a grace-filled experience for even the crabbiest eater.

Where do you go for your favorite crab cake?

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