

Confessions from a Culinary Confessor

By Father Leo Patalinghug

Making a good and honest confession is hard to do. Admitting what we've done wrong, or the good we failed to do means judgment by the one who sees it all. Despite the challenges, confessions are helpful and necessary. We admit the truth, and the truth will set us free. And thank God, our judge is merciful. Even our sins, in his hands, become lessons to help us improve.

Understanding the theology of grace that comes from an honest confession and bringing this understanding into our world and culture means that we must look at the world truthfully, critically – at all times, even when we're eating in a restaurant.

I certainly hope you can sense the deeper reason why the Catholic Review has taken a chance with these Culinary Confessions. We know it's not easy to be critical. Besides, who am I (a priest) to pass judgment on anyone or anything? Hopefully you can see our purpose is not to give destructive critiques, but to be honest in a constructive and a personally reflective way.

We are in the business of serving and feeding God's people. If we don't do it, the devil will. Just look at the food-related, confusing tricks played on Adam and Eve. These culinary confessions give us pause to reflect how we are doing in feeding and nourishing people's faith.

We, as the Church – involved in “food service” – can learn from the good and even bad examples of our secular counterparts: restaurants. Culinary Confessions provides opportunities to dine, learn and help our church make faith connections where God's people are found. And they are hungry, which is why I want to learn best practices in serving hungry souls.

If you notice, these “confessions” try to provide little lessons to help us become

better servants of faith, not just in church, but everywhere. Experiential faith ought to parallel a great dining experience. It should help us celebrate, whet our appetites, satisfy our hungers, and make us want to share the good news about this “place” (church or parish, for example), where you will be fed the best of foods – the Eucharist!

Looking at restaurants critically, we can ask if our church welcomes people, serves them joyfully, provides dynamism and gives comfort to those hungering for God.

Some may consider it a stretch to make such a comparison, but I follow the example of Christ who taught some of his greatest lessons around food and the family dinner table. Hopefully our Catholic Review readers will do the same. After all, as I said before, if we don’t feed the flock, the devil will.

In future columns, I hope to widen our culinary confessions. We will make a slight change and give “halos” instead of Hail Marys – highlighting restaurants for what they do right rather than giving penances for what they do wrong. And, we will also want to hear more from you! Let us know if you have food and faith connection or a restaurant you’d like for me to review. Tell us what you think of our Culinary Confessions, and keep reading for ways to join me as my guest, on a future culinary confession.

Next month, I search for holy smokin’ good barbecue. Do you have a favorite barbecue spot, or even a favorite sauce – or perhaps your own secret recipe? I’ll do my best to share some helpful tips, fun faith analogies and spiritual connections about one of America’s unique culinary experiences.

And, as I said before: I’ll be honest. But I will also follow Archbishop William E. Lori’s episcopal motto, “Truth in Charity.” Now that will truly set us free!

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