

Gourmet goodness in Catonsville

By Father Leo Patalinghug

“Gourmet” refers to product quality, freshness (not necessarily organic), the cook’s preparation knowledge, and detail of service such as plating and atmosphere. That’s what you find at Catonsville Gourmet.

Around the corner from St. Mark Church, faithful foodies have easy access with street or back-lot parking. An initial impression of the restaurant gives a very Cape Cod feel – bright light-green and white colors, accented by hardwood flooring and exposed brick walls. My table needed stabilizing and the paneling needed a wipe down from food splatter. (I’m not a fan of plastic flower arrangements – even if it wasn’t distracting to the layout, color schemes and other appointments.)

Different sections in the dining area, including a bar and market-styled seating, offer many seating options. The BYOB for a \$5 cork fee gives diners a “feel-at-home” atmosphere. Hard surfaces make the place hum with conversation, and the cheerful bustle reminds diners they have made a good choice to eat here. Our particular waitress could have had more food knowledge, but she was good to secure the manager who helped answer all of my questions in a professional, friendly way.

Fresh and sustainable farm-raised seafood makes Catonsville Gourmet a unique dining option in an area saturated with fast food. The menu includes raw oysters, seasonal fish varieties, hearty salads, gourmet sandwiches and beef entrees.

The cream of crab soup is one of the best (and most unique) I’ve had. In a dish normally heavy with roux and cream, the crab is elevated – infused with a hint of saffron and sweetened with minced carrots and corn.

The pretzel-bread crab cake club gives great-tasting, filler-free crab cakes bolder flavors, served with crispy bacon and grainy mustard aioli. The decision to serve fresh fruit is very gourmet, balancing bold flavors with citrus sweetness and tartness, preventing the dish from being one note.

The signature fish dish, the Halibut St. Martin, gives a nod to Asian fusion flavors. The crusted filet, oven finished to perfection, is accented with a sweet-and-sour Thai chili sauce infused with fresh-grilled fruit. The base – blanched asparagus, baby carrots and oven-roasted fingerling potatoes – makes this a fulfilling meal. At \$27, this near-perfect execution, exemplifies the type of attention to detail that makes this place truly gourmet.

The restaurant proudly collaborates with a local bakery, serving up humongous and tasty dessert portions. I ordered their popular Smith Island Cake – a Maryland tradition of thin layers of yellow cake and chocolate ganache with peanut butter cups.

The friendly service, the pleasant dining atmosphere, food quality and attention to plating details fits the description of what it means to be gourmet.

As faithful foodies, we would do well to consider how our faith requires us to do the same in our parishes. We have the best product of all - the Lamb of God. And, hopefully we practice our faith as a "Godly gourmand"- keeping it fresh, highlighting it, serving it with friendliness and attention to detail.

In the coming months, I hope to review restaurants owned by Catholic families. Do you or someone from your church own a restaurant? Email us at FrLeo@CatholicReview.org.



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