

Romantic cookbook - for your critique

By Father Leo Patalinghug

Offering food critique and restaurant reviews opens me up to some playful teasing from people, especially my brother priests.

At any given meal they may ask, “How many halos did this meal get?” or “Are you going to write about this dinner in The Catholic Review?” When I do the cooking, they turn the tables and ask, “Can I write a review about your cooking?” I am the guy giving the critique; some may wonder, can I take it?

Good question.

I had the opportunity to hear critiques from people around the country about my recent food-faith-family effort – my latest book, “Spicing Up Married Life.”

As part of the writing process, I opened an opportunity for recipe testers. We were bombarded with hundreds of applicants, all wanting to participate and give feedback. From the hundreds of applicants, we selected 24 couples, two per chapter, to critique my work. And critique they did. They looked at portion control, amounts for ingredients, my motivation for choosing one recipe over another and even found a few “typos.” They critiqued everything.

While it’s tough to hear people’s critique of something so important and personal, I welcomed it with open arms! This was one of the most helpful exercises in making this book the effective pastoral tool for marriage as I intended it to be.

The book consists of pastoral, theological and spiritual discussions regarding the sacramental marriage vow; questions to engage dinner conversations; recipes for a romantic dinner date; and suggested prayers to bring God back into the

conversation. Instead of an anniversary celebration, my book encourages a “month-aversy” – monthly dinner dates to celebrate love. Why should a couple do this only once a year?

“Spicing Up Married Life” looks at marriage through the lens of Christ and his church’s teachings. It offers guidance for strengthening family life, starting with mom and dad. By God’s providence, I was fortunate to dedicate this book to my parents on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary – the day of the book’s release.

I’m happy to say the book, thus far, has received reviews of 5 out of 5 halos – even from secular sources. Couples say they enjoy the recipes, lessons and full-color photos of the food. A Retrouvaille Group (a marriage counseling group) may use the book as part of its program. Another couple wants to use it for their parish’s marriage preparation program. But, the best feedback came from the selected couples who critiqued my recipes. They liked the recipes, but enjoyed the concept of a monthly romantic meal.

Admittedly, I may not have a chance to cook for you personally. But you can still offer this “Culinary Confessor” your ideas, comments and even critiques of my recipes. My books, especially the newest one, give you a perfect chance to be honest with me, but most importantly with your spouse. And if you give honest critique motivated by God’s love, don’t worry; we can give it and take it.

In December, I want to review a restaurant that puts me in a Christmas mood – a restaurant with a fireplace! If you have a favorite restaurant with a fireplace, let us know. And, if you send us your suggestions, your name will be included in a drawing for an opportunity to join me in an upcoming Culinary Confession! So, please be sure to send your comments and restaurant suggestions to FrLeo@CatholicReview.org or gracebeforemeals.com by Nov. 15.

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