

Vegetarian meals are for more than Lenten Fridays

By Father Leo Patalinghug

In the Book of Daniel, the prophet asked the prison guards to give the Jewish servants only vegetables instead of the food from the king's table. They didn't want to break their Jewish dietary restrictions, but they must have also known something that parents have always encouraged: eating vegetables is good for you! At the end of the trial period, these "faithful foodies" were much healthier - a sign of Godly living.

This story, along with preparing for Lent, inspired me to do a Culinary Confession on a meatless restaurant: One World Café in Baltimore.

Going to a vegetarian or vegan restaurant can worry some meat lovers. Will I be satisfied? Admittedly, I also find it difficult to enjoy a forced diet, especially if it comes with a moralizing "tree-hugging, animal-protecting" attitude. I don't need to feel guilty just because I like steak.

While One World Café certainly caters to veggie lovers, I was very satisfied by the food and comfortable with the casual and friendly service. I was edified to hear the sisters who own One World were subscribers to the Catholic Review. Executive Chef Susan Novak is a parishioner of St. Thomas Aquinas in Hampden.

The One World atmosphere is eclectic. The front room is a true college-hipster hangout. Bright painted walls give a modern vibe for an area that serves as a bar for alcoholic beverages, coffee and pastries. Wi-fi invites the earphone-wearing laptop crowd for homework or hanging out. The main dining room, by contrast, is a bit bare, but clean. Diners were equally eclectic, encompassing seniors, college

students and families with young children. Street parking and stairs down to the dining room can make it inconvenient for some patrons.

The staff was primarily young and bohemian-fashioned with tattoos and piercings, especially the ominous-looking bar tender who wound up being so kind - even well-mannered. Our waitress was informative and patient with my many food preparation questions. I sensed no meat-lovers guilt trip. The staff seemed content simply to serve good-tasting food. And the food was quite good.

With a combination of vegetarian and vegan (no animal products, including dairy), I sampled familiar flavors including a Philly cheese steak(less), packed with caramelized vegetables and a well-marinated seitan, "wheat meat," that produced the texture of tender beef. The baked non-chicken parmesan used densely breaded tofu that looked and tasted like layered lasagna, served with a tasty but unnecessary side of linguine marinara. A Greek-inspired veggie gyro, a tasty variety of vegetables wrapped in pita, was served with a traditional tzatziki sauce. The creamy mushroom soup was hearty and comforting. They even offered vegan desserts that still felt rich and decadent.

The food portions were generous, especially for the moderate pricing. These dishes, personally created by chef-owner Novak, left me feeling satisfied. For me, the most creative dish was the Maryland-inspired crab-less cake, made with shredded zucchini. Combining it with traditional binders gave it the texture of backfin crabmeat.

My experience of One World Café gave me a new perspective and respect for plant-based menus. Hunger satisfaction and a non-preachy approach to healthy eating makes One World Café a great restaurant for more than vegetarians and Friday meals during Lent.

Bring a copy of this article to One World Café, and receive a discount off your total price.

Next month: "Surprising food finds." Have you ever stumbled upon a restaurant only to find it becomes one of your favorite places? Let me know about it at FrLeo@CatholicReview.org. If I use your suggestion, you will be eligible for a Grace

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