

Feasts and Fasts for February 2008

February Date	Saint or Feast	Ingredient	Dish
1	Brigid (Bride)		Bairn Brack (spiced yeast bread), Champ (potatoes with butter)
2	The Presentation of Our Lord		
3	Anskar, Bishop of Hamburg, Missionary to Denmark and Sweden		Onion soup
4	Cornelius the Centurion		Profiteroles
5	The Martyrs of Japan		
13	Absalom Jones		
14	St. Valentine, Cyril and Methodius	Anything pink or red, chocolate	Love knots, tenderloin
15	Thomas Bray		
23	Polycarp		
24	Saint Matthias the Apostle		Salmon with Napa cabbage
27	George Herbert		

Feasting with the Saints – February 2008

Welcome to February. This is a month of many celebrations -- we welcome St. Valentine, St. Brigid, Cornelius, George Herbert, and many others. We celebrate romantic love, an important bishop to Sweden and Denmark, one of the most important saints in Ireland, and many others.

The month begins with the feast of St. Bridgid of Ireland. St. Bridgid was a legendary figure in Ireland. Stories of her charity and miracles abound, many related to food. As a young girl, she once gave away all the family's butter to the poor, but God replaced it "with usury." A leprous woman once asked her for a glass of milk; Bridgid had none, but gave her cold water. When the woman drank it, it had turned into milk and it healed the woman. She is said to have changed her bathwater into beer to quench the thirst of some unexpected visitors. On one occasion, her cows gave three milkings a day so that some visiting bishops would have something to drink.

On St. Bridgid's day (Feb) it is traditional for Irish farmers to bake a bairn brack, or spiced yeast bread. The neighbors are invited in and everyone eats the bread along with ale and song and stories. We will be serving bairn brack today to help us remember this generous saint. Of course, we will also serve Irish potatoes and Brussel sprouts, two traditional Irish vegetables, along with our lunch today.

February 2nd is Candlemas. This is the day when everyone brings their candles to the church to be blessed. The feast is based on the incident where Mary placed her son in the hands of Simeon. This presentation was to remind us of the offering by God of his Son as the perfect sacrifice for all.

Anskar, the Archbishop of Hamburg and Missionary to Denmark and Sweden, is remembered primarily for his tireless missionary work among the unconverted among the Swedes and Danes. As Archbishop of Hamburg, he had a comfortable job and life. He was not content to simply enjoy his position, however. He experienced a vision that told him "Go and declare the work of God to the nations." Like Abram and Moses before him, he took the vision seriously and left a life of comfort and security for a life of uncertainty to serve the Lord.

We serve onion soup in his honor today. Onions are one of the cold-weather vegetables and very common in Scandinavian cooking.

Cornelius the Centurion was the first Gentile converted to the Christian faith, along with his household. As such, he is the predecessor of all Gentiles who became Christians. His ingredient is ice cream. The Romans loved cold items. They had a sophisticated system of runners who brought ice and snow from the mountains to Rome during warmer months so that they could prepare iced specialties, such as gelato, the Italian form of ice cream. We are serving profiteroles, an Italian ice cream specialty, in his honor.

St. Valentine is probably a composite of three men. Two were martyred in Rome in the 3rd century. St. Valentine is the patron saint of lovers, travelers, beekeepers, epileptics, and the handicapped. Probably his most famous association is with romantic love. While there is some evidence that his feast day coincides with the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia which celebrates romantic love, the first direct

evidence is a letter from the fifteenth century that shows the tradition was already in place. “And cousin, upon Friday is St. Valentine’s Day, and every bird chooseth him a mate, and if it like you to come on Thursday at night, and so purvey that you may abide there until Monday, I trust to God that you shall speak to my husband and I pray that we shall bring the matter to a conclusion.”

The major symbols of the day – hearts, the color red, angels, and flowers, and the themes of tenderness, fidelity, the forming of the bonds of love, are all strong traditions in the Christian faith.

In his honor, we are serving tenderloin (not too rare, but I think you will see the “red” connection). We are also serving love knots as our pre-lunch snack. Love knots are sweet pretzels. The figure 8 shape is intended to evoke the symbol for infinity since they symbolize that love is eternal and without end. They are also gold (with yellow food coloring and yellow sprinkles) since that beautiful precious metal never tarnishes and never loses its perfection.

On the 26th, we celebrate St. Matthias the Apostle. St. Matthias was selected by the disciples to replace Judas and return the disciples to their original 12. Since the apostles were fishers of men, we have made a salmon served on a bed of Napa cabbage in his honor. The garnish is a golden lemon and a red cross made from roasted red bell pepper.

Romantic love, Ireland, the first Gentile converted to Christianity, a new disciple chosen to replace one of the original 12 – February is a very busy month. As we move from the joy and gaiety of Mardi Gras to the introspection and quiet devotions of Lent, let us remember the saints that have gone before us and seek to follow their example.

Praise be to God!

Menu for February Feasting with the Saints

Starter:

Love Knots

Appetizer

Onion Soup with cheese croutons

Fish

Salmon with Napa Cabbage and roasted red peppers

Meat

Tenderloin with roasted Portobello mushrooms

Vegetables

Champ (mashed potatoes) and brussel sprouts

Dessert

Profiteroles with home-made hot fudge sauce

Bread

Bairn Brack

Love Knots

Onion Soup Les Halles (serves 6-8)

It is helpful to have good beef stock for this soup. Do not use the bouillon cubes – they are too salty and have an off-taste.

Soup

4 T unsalted butter
2 T olive oil
6 c sliced yellow onions
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 t sugar
1/3 c Cognac
1 T Dijon mustard
½ t dried thyme
3 T flour
3 quarts beef stock
1 ½ c dry white wine
Salt and pepper

Croutons

8 slices baguette
Olive oil (for brushing)
Pesto
8 ounces Gruyere, shredded
8 ounces smoked mozzarella, shredded
4 ounces Parmesan, grated

Soup Directions:

- 1) Heat butter and oil in pot. Add onions and cook over medium high heat for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 2) Add the garlic and sugar. Reduce heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are golden brown, about 40 minutes. THIS STEP CANNOT BE HURRIED. IT IS THE BASE OF THE FLAVOR OF THE SOUP.
- 3) Pour in the Cognac. Warm and light. When the flames subside, add the mustard and thyme. Stir in the flour and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes.
- 4) Gradually stir in the stock and wine. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Simmer uncovered for 1 hour.

Croutons:

- 1) Preheat oven to 350.

- 2) Brush croutons lightly on one side with olive oil. Toast lightly on that side.
- 3) Turn over. Brush lightly with pesto and sprinkle with mozzarella, gruyere, and parmesan. Toast until cheese is melted.
- 4) You can serve the crouton in the soup or on the side. I prefer mine on the side so it is not so messy to eat.

Salmon with Napa Cabbage (serves 4 – 6)

1 3-4 pound side of salmon, with bones and skin removed – portioned in 4 oz sections

1 head Napa cabbage, shredded

1 c white wine

1 c chicken stock

2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and diced

Olive oil

Lemon juice

Lemon peel (small julienne)

Salt and pepper

Basil leaves

Parsley

- 1) Preheat oven to 375.
- 2) Toss shredded cabbage, jalapeno peppers, lemon juice, basil, parsley, and lemon peel together.
- 3) Put in bottom of shallow hotel pan.
- 4) Rub salmon with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Garnish each piece with a half lemon slice and a cross made of roasted red peppers.
- 5) Arrange salmon on top of cabbage. Cover hotel pan tightly with foil.
- 6) Cook 20-25 minutes. Check one piece of fish. If slightly underdone, that is ok because it will continue to cook as it cools.

Mashed Potatoes (serves 4 – 6 with leftovers for potato pancakes)

10 pounds Yukon Gold or russet potatoes

2 sticks butter

1-2 c half-and-half -- lukewarm

Salt and pepper

- 1) Peel and dice potatoes. Hold in cool water until ready to cook. I like to do this for at least an hour to get out some of the excess starch.
- 2) Cook potatoes in boiling water until soft – about 15-20 minutes
- 3) Drain potatoes. Return to pan. Cook over medium heat for 2 – 5 minutes or until most of the excess water is boiled away. This is a critical step. It keeps the potatoes from being watery.
- 4) Add butter and mash until butter is melted. Add half-and half until smooth.
- 5) Add plenty of salt and pepper – potatoes need salt. Kosher salt is best.

Roasted Brussel Sprouts (serves 4)

1 pound Brussel sprouts

Salt

Pepper

Olive oil

1 large red onion, sliced

- 1) Preheat oven to 375.
- 2) Clean Brussel sprouts. Cut X in bottom of each sprout with paring knife to allow excess gas to escape during cooking.
- 3) Toss Brussel sprouts and onions in olive oil. Salt and pepper to taste. Put on shallow pan and roast for 30-40 minutes, shaking occasionally to allow for even browning.

Profiteroles (serves 4)

Cream puffs (makes about 12)

Ice cream (I prefer coffee, but chocolate or vanilla are just as good)

Hot fudge sauce

- 1) Prepare cream puffs using standard recipe.
- 2) Stuff cream puffs with ice cream.
- 3) To serve, use 2 -3 profiteroles per serving. Add dollop of whipped cream, hot fudge sauce, and sprinkle with lightly toasted sliced almond

Chocolate fudge sauce

4 oz unsweetened chocolate (use the best you can find – I prefer Callabaut or Valrhona)

3 T unsalted butter

2/3 c water

1 2/3 c sugar

6 T corn syrup

1 T rum

- 1) Melt chocolate and butter very slowly in a heavy saucepan.
- 2) Heat water to boiling.
- 3) When chocolate and butter have melted, add boiling water.
- 4) Add sugar and corn syrup and mix until smooth. Turn heat up and stir until mixture starts to boil. Adjust heat so that sauce is just maintained at the boiling point. Allow the sauce to boil without stirring for 9 minutes.
- 5) Remove sauce from heat and cool for 15 minutes. Stir in rum.
- 6) Sauce keeps in refrigerator, tightly covered, for 2-3 days. Serve over profiteroles, ice cream, chocolate cake, anything!

Bairn Brack

2 pkgs dry yeast
½ c warm milk (about 100 – 110 degrees)
1 c brown sugar
1 stick unsalted butter
½ c lukewarm water
4 ½ c flour
2 t salt
4 eggs
3 -4 t caraway seeds
½ c currants
¼ t each nutmeg, allspice, and cinnamon
** Can also add pinch of cloves and ginger

- 1) Dissolve yeast in milk.
- 2) Stir in 1 t of brown sugar. Let mixture sit for about 10 minutes, or until bubbly.
- 3) Melt butter in water, cool slightly. Pour into large bowl.
- 4) Stir in flour and salt. Add eggs, stirring well. Add yeast mixture.
- 5) Stir in remaining sugar, caraway seeds, currants, and spices. Beat for 2 – 3 minutes.
- 6) Turn out dough onto a floured surface, and knead for about 10 minutes, or until smooth and glossy.
- 7) Place dough in buttered bowl and let rise until doubled.
- 8) Punch dough down and form into a large round cake.
- 9) Place in buttered pan, cover, and let rise again until doubled in bulk about 1 hour.
- 10) Bake at 375 for 45 – 55 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean, and the bread sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom.
- 11) Glaze the bread while hot with a mixture of 1 T water and 1 T powdered sugar.

12) Love Knots (12 – 14 love knots)

1 c butter

1 c sugar

1 egg yolk

2 eggs

$\frac{1}{4}$ c sour cream

1 t vanilla

Several drops yellow food coloring

2 $\frac{1}{2}$ c flour

1 t grated lemon rind

Yellow sprinkles

- 1) Beat butter until soft.
- 2) Add sugar. Blend butter-sugar mixture until fluffy.
- 3) Beat in egg yolk, eggs, sour cream, vanilla, and yellow food coloring. Sift and stir in flour, stir in lemon rind.
- 4) Chill the dough for several hours. If it gets too warm, it will be hard to handle. Just put in back in the refrigerator until cold again.
- 5) Preheat oven to 375.
- 6) Shape dough into ropes about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter. Twist the ropes into figure-8s. Place the twists on a baking sheet and bake for about 15 minutes. About halfway through cooking, sprinkle with yellow sprinkles.