

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

Opened in 1919, less than a year after the World War I armistice with Italy on the winning side, *La Vittoria* ("The Victory") at Via delle Fornaci 15, is the oldest restaurant on the Trastevere/Janiculum side of Vatican City (to the left as one looks toward the facade of St. Peter's). "At first it was a *bettola*, meaning a greasy spoon," Claudio Di Bartolomeo, its extrovert 48-year-old owner since 2002 (many clients refer to the restaurant as "Claudio's"), told me. Claudio came to work here from his family's farm near Trivento in the Molise (a province in south-central Italy) as a dishwasher when he was 17. He slowly rose through the ranks as waiter, assistant cook, and chef under the guidance of *La Vittoria*'s former owner and Claudio's "second father,"

Enzo, another *Molisano*. At first *La Vittoria* was a *fiaschetta*, a wine shop, where men brought their own food and played cards or *bocce*. "In the 1920s, between us and Vatican City, there were stables for the Eternal City's horse carriages and an imposing medieval city-gate, Porta Cavalleggeri, which was torn down during the Fascist era to widen the street," Claudio said.

Until after World War II, directly uphill from here there were *fornaci* or brickyards, hence the street name (via delle Fornaci). They got their clay from the nearby street Via dell'Argilla or "Clay Street," both surrounded by fields until Via Gregorio VII was built in the 1960s.

Although I live a only short walk from cozy, ever-popular *La Vittoria*, decorated with photographs of Popes John Paul II (the well-known photo taken by our photographer, Grzegorz Galazka), Benedict XVI and Francis, and St. Peter's as well as a huge cowbell from Germany-Switzerland (a gift of the Swiss Guards), I had never eaten here until a few days before Christmas when Robert Moynihan, who's known Claudio from the magazine's beginning, invited me to lunch with Debbie Tomlinson, who organizes *Inside the Vatican*'s pilgrimages, and Maria Pia Carriquiry-Gomez, a new staff member. Maria Pia's father, Uruguayan Professor Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour, has worked in the Holy See for more than 40 years and since 2011 is Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.



Stefano Navarini illustration

LA VITTORIA  
WON TRIPADVISOR'S  
"CERTIFICATE OF  
EXCELLENCE" IN 2013

(FRIAR TUCK IS ON A DIET FOR A TIME)

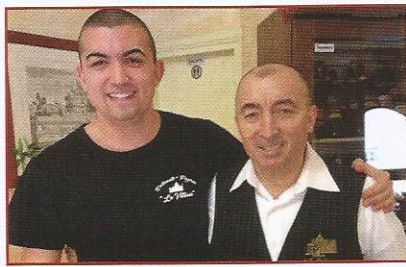
The reasonably-priced menu offers a wide choice of *antipasti* (from 3-10 euros each), pasta and soups (between 7-9 euros), meat and fish courses (between 9-16 euros), seasonal side-dishes (7-9 euros), and home-made desserts (5 euros), with each entry translated into English, German, and Spanish, and served in abundant portions. Pizza, Roman-style with a thin crust, is served both at lunch and evenings. The house pizza is topped with shellfish. TripAdvisor awarded *La Vittoria* a "Certificate of Excellence" in 2013.

I ordered a Roman staple *spaghetti alla carbonara*; Deborah *minestrone* followed by the typically Latium *penne all'arrabbiata*; Robert *minestra di farro*, a hearty country-style barley soup followed by *carciofi alla*

*romana* (artichokes Roman-style); and Maria Pia *saltimbocca alla romana* (veal escalopes Roman-style) followed by a *tiramisù* she said was to-die-for. We ordered the house red wine, which is a *Montepulciano d'Abruzzo* (the house white is from the *Castelli Romani*).

Robert is not Claudio's only friend at *Inside the Vatican*. The day after our lunch, when I returned to chat with Claudio and his son Leonardo who recently graduated from hotel management school, who should come in but our photographer Grzegorz Galazka, an *habitué* here. Another, before Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope, was Archbishop Georg Gänswein. Many Swiss Guards, members of the Vatican Press Corps, Father Lombardi and Dr. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, students at the Pontifical North American College and its Rector Monsignor Joseph F. Checchio, are also regulars, Claudio told me. Over the years, American Cardinals Dolan, O'Malley, and O'Brien have frequently enjoyed Claudio's cuisine.

For the past several years, *La Vittoria*'s chef is "Giovanni" from Bangladesh, who worked beside Claudio when Claudio ran the kitchen. On my second visit, Claudio told me the house specialties were his *antipasti*, pasta dishes, and *toscanello*, an in-house invention similar to *mille-feuille*. He offered me his favorite and Giovanni's star, *fusilli* (corkscrews) *alla califfa*, with bacon, mushrooms, *pachino* tomatoes, basil, parsley, and cream, and Maria Pia's highly recommended *tiramisù*. How right she was! ○



Center, Claudio Di Bartolomeo and his tall son, Leonardo. Left, **FUSILLI** (corkscrews) **ALLA CALIFFA**, with bacon, mushrooms, pachino tomatoes, basil, parsley and cream. Right, the **TIRAMISÙ**, a house specialty. (Photo credit: Mother Martha)

### RESTAURANT LA VITTORIA

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Closed Tuesday - All credit cards accepted except Diners. Wheelchair accessible