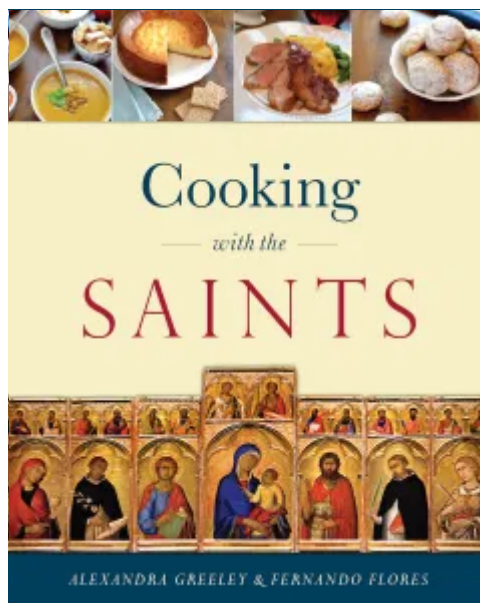




# Cooking with the Saints

by Lucy Gordan | Food



Last fall, when Sarah Lemieux, the Associate Director of Publicity at the Sophia Institute Press, sent me a review copy of the *Vatican Christmas Cookbook* (see my article 11/23/2020) in the package she also included a copy of *Cooking with the Saints* (2019) (Hardcover: \$21.24). Its authors are Alexandra “Sandy” Greeley, a professional chef and author of 35 cookbooks, and Fernando Flores, “a tireless world traveler and an advocate of all things relating to food and faith.” Greeley is a specialist of Asian cuisine, specifically Thai and Vietnamese, but also of vegetarian and Mexican. Flores, the son of immigrants from Colombia and Mexico, has worked for the UN for over 25 years and has traveled to more than 40 countries. Presently (so after the volume’s publication) he is the head of the UNHCR’s (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Field Office in Lago Agrio, Ecuador. Before that he was stationed for the UNHCR in Colombia, Mexico, and Angola. Before UNHCR, he worked for ECLAC (The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) in Washington D.C. and New York City. It was while he lived in the Washington area that he volunteered at the Parish of St. Veronica. *Cooking with the Saints* is the printed result of very popular cooking lessons based on the lives and cuisines of Catholic Saints and held in the Parish of St. Veronica in Chantilly, Virginia, a suburb Washington D.C., beginning in 2010. Since people from every part of the world live in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, St. Veronica’s parishioners were also very international. At first the classes were open to parishioners only, but eventually opened

to anyone with interest. For a minimal fee the students learned how to cook dishes from different cultures and then sat down with their classmates to eat them. At the end of each class the students took home a packet of recipes, a short biography of the saint of that day, and a prayer written by that day's saint.

Although the book's Introduction tells us that the Catholic Church has over 10,000 recognized saints, the authors of this 311-page volume was forced to make a selection so the volume opens with a list of the over 70 saints downsized by the authors. They come from all over the world; some, like St. Veronica, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Patrick, St. Ignatius Loyola, and St. Theresa of Calcutta are universally well known, others only locally. Only two saints: John Neumann (January 5) and Catherine Drexel (March 3) are American. Italy counts the largest number of saints included here with nine: St. Thomas Aquinas (January 28), St. Apollonius (April 18), St. Anselm of Canterbury (April 21), St. Catherine of Siena (April 29), St. Aloysius Gonzaga (June 21), St. Padre Pio (September 23), St. Francis of Assisi (October 4), St. Charles Borromeo (November 4) and St. Ambrose (December 7).

The first chapter is called "Sacred Days". It explains the Six Holy Days of Obligation for American Catholics: The Solemnity of Mary celebrated on January 1, Ascension Thursday (forty days after Easter), the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15, All Saints Day on November 1, The Immaculate Conception on December 8, and Christmas, and then the "Other Holy Days": Epiphany, Christ's Baptism, Candlemas, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday, Pentecost, Most Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi, and All Souls Day.

The next twelve chapters are organized chronologically by the month, from January through December, each with an opening page listing the month's four highlighted saints, each with his or her dish, plus an additional full menu, called "The Saintly Meal" dedicated to that month's most important saint, so five saints per month. Each entry opens with a short biography of the saint followed by a recipe. "The Saintly Meals" include a shopping list of all the recipes' necessary ingredients, and ends with a quotation from the saint. Every dish is beautifully photographed. For example, January's saints are Basil, John Neumann, Francis of Sales, and Thomas Aquinas. The "Saintly Meal" is dedicated to St. Anthony the Abbot.

Since *Epicurean-Traveler* is an American publication, St. John Neumann's recipe is Cheesecake New York Style. Although born in the Czech Republic in 1811, he came to New York in 1836 and was ordained in St. Patrick's Cathedral. For many years he worked with immigrants near Niagara Falls, became a US citizen and in 1852 was appointed the Bishop of Philadelphia. He's most admired for setting up the parochial school system. He died suddenly while doing errands in 1861 and is buried in the National Shrine named for him in Philadelphia. So far he is the only American male to be canonized (in 1977).

St. Katharine Drexel, born in 1851 in Philadelphia, grew up very wealthy and well educated. The turning point in her life came while she nursed her stepmother through terminal cancer. She decided that her family fortune could help others and so joined The Sisters of Mercy Convent in Pittsburgh. "With several other nuns," the volume tells us, "she founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to aid Native Americans and African Americans. Her congregation opened the first mission boarding school in Santa Fe, New Mexico...By the mid-1900s, the number of religious institutions that St. Katherine's order had founded

numbered 145 missions, 49 elementary schools, and 12 high schools. Her recipe here is Philadelphia Cheesesteak Sandwich. St. Katharine was the second person born in what is now the United States to be canonized as a saint and the first one born a US citizen. She is buried in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia.

The final chapter, “The History of Celebratory Cookies”, also organized by the month, is recipes for 16 sweets enjoyed on Feast Days. The best known are boat-shaped “*navettes*” to honor Our Lady’s arrival (February 2) in Marseilles and “*Madeleines*” for St. Mary Magdalene (July 22), who accompanied Our Lady to France. Madeleine, French for Magdalene, is the unofficial national cookie of France.

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