

# SACRED FEASTS

FROM A MONASTERY KITCHEN

RECIPES *and*  
REFLECTIONS

From the Best-Selling Author of  
*From a Monastery Kitchen*

Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette



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# Introduction

**L**IFE IN A MONASTERY KITCHEN has a unique appeal. After my monastic-themed cookbooks *From a Monastery Kitchen* and *Twelve Months of Monastery Soups* were published, readers asked for more daily moments, happenings, inspirations, and anecdotes from our monastic kitchen. Those requests gave birth to the idea of a book that shares the intimate workings of a monastery kitchen, which in many ways is no different than that of an ordinary home.

Each chapter conveys a vision and approach to food spirituality that underscore the sacred place meals have in a monastery. To the monk cook, food is sacred because God created it and because Jesus gave himself under its auspices. It's little wonder the monks of old described their reverent approach to food as the "sacrament of the table."

*Sacred Feasts* closely follows the secular and monastic calendars, including Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, Pentecost, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving as well as times that call for more sobriety and restraint, such as Lent and Advent. Mother Nature's calendar also profoundly influences the day-to-day events in any monastery. This is particularly true in our monastery because of its location in the New York–New England border, where the four seasons are lived in all their plenitude.

I composed the essays and prepared the menus on the dates given at the beginning of the essays, at least six per month. The essays begin with an inspirational quotation, relate the weather and particulars of the day, continue with the work in the kitchen and gardens, describe the day's feast or event, and conclude with the day's menu. Some of the recipes are provided so readers can recreate and experiment with the dishes, authentic food both for the body and the soul.

I hope readers are inspired by these candid kitchen tales and discover in themselves an affinity for the monastic approach to cooking, which is characterized by simplicity, tastefulness, and resilient frugality. It's also imbued with the innumerable joys and ways of praising God daily through the practice of food spirituality in the humble sanctuary of the kitchen.

*Bon appétit à tous!*

BROTHER VICTOR-ANTOINE D'AVILA-LATOURRETTE  
FEAST OF PENTECOST, 2009



*Let us strive  
to make  
the present  
moment  
beautiful.*

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

# Measurement–Conversion Chart

## United States Customary Unit Equivalents

1 pinch =  $\frac{1}{16}$  teaspoon

1 dash =  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon

3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon

4 tablespoons =  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup

48 teaspoons = 1 cup

16 tablespoons = 1 cup

2 cups = 1 pint

2 pints = 1 quart

4 quarts = 1 gallon

8 fluid ounces = 1 cup

16 dry ounces = 1 pound

## United States Customary Units to Metric Units

1 teaspoon = 5 milliliters

1 tablespoon = 15 milliliters

1 cup = 240 milliliters

1 pint = 470 milliliters

1 quart = .95 liter

1 gallon = 3.8 liters

1 fluid ounce = 30 milliliters

1 dry ounce = 28 grams

1 pound = 454 grams

# JANUARY



## JANUARY 1 ♦ The New Year

**J**ANUARY is the birth month of the year. Once more we complete another full life cycle as we say goodbye to the old year, and then suddenly we're face-to-face with the new. What will the new year bring, we all ask? What surprises does it have in store? We enter into something new, and it inescapably makes us wonder about its unpredictability, its possible surprises, its uncertain future, its final purpose, and its eventual outcome.

Today is also the feast of Mary, the Mother of God. Whatever the year has in store, it's a good omen that we begin its counting under her unfailing protection. Mary reminds us that all time is God's time; we must not cling to it as a possession, but as something to use wisely during our earthly life just as she and Christ did during their time on Earth. As we begin the new year, it's good to seriously consider how we use the length of time given to us, how we spend our days, and what our ultimate goals are. So New Year's Day is not only an occasion for celebration, but also for serious reflection on the purpose of our lives and for resolutions on enhancing our future days and making them richer with gifts from the Spirit of God.

Since just before Christmas Day—over a week now—our monastery kitchen has been busy with festal table preparations as the celebration of the Lord's Incarnation is expressed in our food arrangements. Today, in spite of its being New Year's Day and the solemnity of the Mother of God, I decided I needed contrast to our festive meals of the last few days. I'm deliberately celebrating with food of rustic origins, hearty and soul-warming, just what we need to face the cold temperatures. Rustic meals have a charm and refinement all their own. There's something so friendly, so simple and earthy, about them. They're not fancy, but they are appetizing and delicious, they easily warm our hearts, and they go a long way toward inspiring conviviality at a gathering.

Today's meal consists of a hearty hot soup that can be started the day before, a cheese



*January,  
the first month  
of the year,  
like its namesake,  
looks back  
over the past,  
and forward  
to the future,  
with hope and  
good resolutions.*

ANONYMOUS



fondue, a mixed-green salad, and a plain flan for dessert. Fondue's communal nature as a meal makes it an appealing and irresistible dish, so appropriate for New Year's Day. Besides, it's easy, economical, and fun to share with friends.

All in all, this rustic holiday meal—a mirror of our simple lifestyle—has nothing to envy of more sumptuous celebrations. The soup and the dessert, though not elaborate, take a bit more time and can be prepared a day ahead; in fact, the soup usually tastes better the next day. The fondue and the salad demand less time and can be done on the same day.

## **PASTA E FAGIOLI SOUP** (Bean and Pasta Soup)

**6–8 SERVINGS**

**1 pound dried white navy beans**  
**8 cups cold water**  
**3 leeks, trimmed at the top,  
thinly sliced**  
**2 potatoes, peeled and cubed**  
**1 large carrot, peeled and cubed**  
**1 celery stalk, thinly sliced**  
**1 tablespoon fresh or dried rosemary**  
**1 tablespoon fresh or dried thyme**  
**2 cups Italian dry white wine**  
**Sea salt and freshly ground pepper**  
**1 cup small macaroni or other  
tubular pasta**  
**5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**1** Place beans and water in a large soup pot and soak overnight, covered, for 10 to 12 hours. The next day add vegetables, rosemary, thyme, and wine. Bring soup to a boil, then lower heat to medium. Cook slowly for about 2 hours. Cover. Add more water if necessary.

**2** Using a ladle, set aside 1 cup of the bean-vegetables mixture. Also set aside separately 2 cups of the liquid.

**3** Make sure there is sufficient liquid in the soup. Just before ready to serve, add pasta and simmer over low heat until pasta is cooked. Stir frequently.

**4** Place in a blender the cup of bean-vegetable mixture, the 2 cups of liquid, and the olive oil and blend thoroughly. When pasta is cooked, add this mixture. Reheat a bit and serve hot.

*After the hearty bean and pasta soup, serve the fondue and basic mixed salad. Fondue is a marvelous dish to serve on a special occasion such as New Year's Day, when friends can gather informally around the fireplace and share something delicious in an intimate setting. There's nothing like shared food to enhance the moment and the pleasure of the company.*

## CHEESE FONDUE

6–8 SERVINGS

2 garlic cloves  
2½ cups dry white wine  
2 cups grated Gruyère cheese  
2 cups Swiss, or other cheese  
3 tablespoons French brandy  
1 tablespoon cornstarch  
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper  
Pinch of nutmeg  
1 crusty French baguette cut into bite-size pieces (warm in oven if necessary)

**1** Crush garlic cloves and rub them on the surface of a medium-size iron pot or fondue pot. Pour wine into the pot, add cheese, and stir continuously over medium heat until cheese melts.

**2** Mix brandy and cornstarch into a paste and add to cheese mixture. Continue stirring until the mixture achieves a creamy consistency. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Stir well for several minutes. Place fondue pot over a wood stove or fondue flame and let your family and friends dip their bread with long forks into the fondue mixture. Accompany the fondue with a mixed-green salad.

## BASIC MIXED SALAD

6–8 SERVINGS

1 head frisée (French curly endive), trimmed  
1 bunch fresh watercress, trimmed with stems discarded  
2 Belgian endives, leaves separated and halved lengthwise  
1 small red onion, thinly sliced

### VINAIGRETTE

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar  
Salt and freshly ground pepper

**1** Place salad greens in a large salad bowl. Just before serving, drizzle olive oil on top.

**2** Toss to coat. Add vinegar, salt, and pepper to taste. Toss once more and serve.

