

An Italian Easter with Lidia

From Chef Matticchio Bastianich Delicious Advice for Good Friday and Easter Sunday

by Lidia Matticchio Bastianich*

“One of the most persistent traits of the Italian culture.... is the cuisine.... There is no other trait of Italian culture that receives anything like this treatment from the American population at large and that would, consequently, be so uniformly reinforced.” says Irving Child in *Italian or American? The second Generation In Conflict*.

Food culture, preparation, and consumption have transcended, more than any other trait, through generations of immigrants. The ritual of the holiday table is the most exemplary, and Easter is the most revered holiday for the Italians. Good Friday is the most solemn day followed by the celebration of the joy of Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

I can tell you the holiday by the dishes served the Italian American feast. The “sfingi”, “baccala” and “zeppole” signify the leanness of Good Friday. Easter Sunday usually follows with the celebratory roasted lamb, fava beans, spring peas, and artichokes. There is always some form of stuffed pasta, tortellini, manicotti, or pasticciata.

The “pizza chiena” is filled with salami eggs and cheese. For dessert, the “pastiera” or ricotta and whole grain pie is enjoyed in addition to the “pinze”, sweet egg bread formed in a braid with colored eggs imbedded in it.



Lidia Matticchio Bastianich

The family meal—especially the Italian holiday meal—reinforces family unity and identity; it is a bond of belonging and continuity.

RUSTIC-CUT ROASTED LAMB SHOULDER

Spalla d’Agnello Arrosto
Makes 6 servings

3 1/2 pounds lamb shoulder (with bones), cut into 2-inch pieces

2 celery ribs, trimmed and roughly chopped

2 large carrots, peeled, trimmed and roughly chopped

1 large onion, peeled and quartered

3 bay leaves

3 sprigs fresh rosemary

1 cup dry white wine

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 cups Chicken Stock or canned reduced-sodium chicken broth

1/4 cup dried porcini mushrooms

Toss all ingredients except the stock and dried porcini together in a bowl. Cover and marinate, tossing several times, then refrigerate overnight. Let stand at room temperature 1 hour before roasting.

Bring the stock to a boil in a small saucepan. Remove from the heat, toss in the porcini and let steep until softened, about 20 minutes. Scoop out the porcini and rinse them lightly to remove and grit. Strain the soaking liquid through a coffee filter or carefully pour

it off into a small bowl, leaving the sediment behind.

Preheat the oven to 475° F. Turn the lamb and marinade ingredients into a roasting pan large enough to hold them in a single layer. Add the mushrooms and their soaking liquid. Cover with aluminum foil and roast 30 minutes.

Remove the foil, season lightly with salt and pepper and roast until the meat is tender, about 1 hour. Turn the pieces of lamb and baste them several times as they cook.

Using a slotted spoon, transfer the meat to an ovenproof serving dish. Set the roasting pan over high heat, bring the liquid in the pan to a boil and boil until the liquid is slightly syrupy, about 15 minutes. Strain the juices into a bowl, pressing on the vegetables to extract as much liquid from them as possible. Spoon off the fat from the surface of the juices and pour the remaining liquid over the meat. Return the lamb to the oven and roast, turning the meat frequently, until very tender and well browned all over, about 15 minutes.

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ITALIAN AMERICANS’ REACTION TO GIBSON’S MOVIE

The Passion Surrounding “The Passion of the Christ”

by Vincent P. Cuccia

Not since *Jesus Christ Superstar* premiered has a portrayal of Jesus Christ’s last days stirred such wild emotions. Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* has been accused of refueling anti-Semitism. It has been hailed for bringing people “back to the fold.” It has been criticized as unnecessarily violent. It has been praised as realistic.

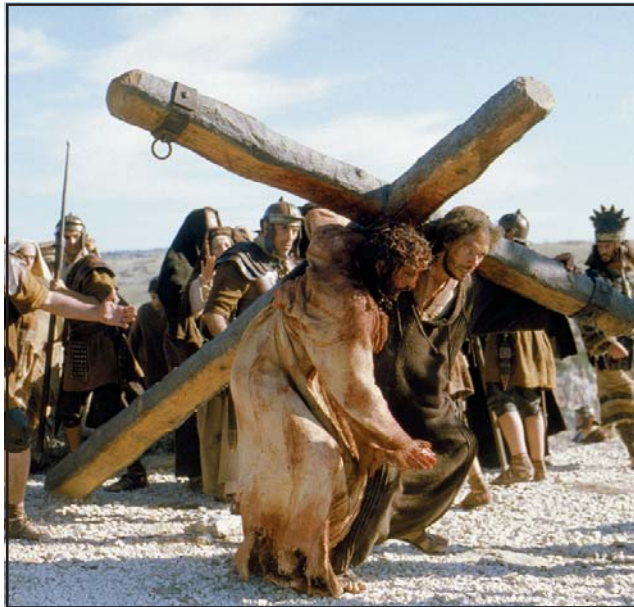
A&I wanted to find out what the leaders of the Italian American Community felt about this controversial film. Consequently, we polled several cultural and artistic leaders such as: Frank Gaurini, Chairman of the National Italian American Foundation; Mario Fratti, playwright; Gay Talese, author; Joseph Sciamè, National President Order, Sons of Italy in America; B. Amore, founder of the Carving Studio and Sculpting Center, educator, and sculptor.

We asked three basic questions: What did you think of the film? What do you think the impact of this film will have on the Italian American community? And did this film

differ from your perception of the Passion?

As with any community, the responses spanned the spectrum. Everyone polled spoke strongly about the violence in the film. Mario Fratti thought the film was an “exploitation of suffering, an exaggeration...a symbol of ferocity and hatred, not love.” Frank Gaurini said it possessed “unnecessary violence that was over emphasized. It looked too Hollywood. It commercialized the event rather than sanctified it” Gay Talese felt, although it was beautifully filmed, the violence had “no personality-one note violence. Spectacle with no suspense.” He found it “tedious.” However, B. Amore felt it was a “truer portrayal than anything I’d seen.” She continued: “It was a graphic depiction of how cruel humans can be.” Joseph Sciamè, a vice president of a Catholic university, claimed, “Gibson has put before our eyes like never before the Passion of Christ. It is the most dramatic portrayal of what might have and did occur.”

When asked what impact is it having on the Italian



A scene from “The Passion of the Christ”

American community, Mario Fratti said, “It will revive hatred for the Jews. It will remind Italian Americans that the Jews killed a Jew.” Gaurini felt that the film showed neither the Jews nor the Romans with any historical accuracy, and, therefore, “There was no impact on the community—the barbarity of the Romans was

beyond credible. The laughing and the scoffing was not believable—it was over exaggerated and redundant.” Gay Talese initially felt there was no impact on the community, but then reconsidered. “(Gibson),” he continued, “could never compete for the Italian American movie goer with

Coppola or Scorsese.” B. Amore admitted honestly that she could not “gauge” the impact of this film on the community. But she did feel, “the message is important today” because that kind of inhumanity “is still alive today—look at the newspaper.” “My family,” Sciamè proudly claimed, “is from Prizzi, which is in the Province of Palermo...I’ve seen the procession—so for (Italians and Italian Americans) it’s always been dramatic. It is in my veins to have respect for the Passion and it reconfirms that respect for Italian Americans. I think they will be moved.”

Mario Fratti felt the film differed “completely” from his perception of the Passion: “There was something beautiful about the death of Jesus (for me), and, now, (this film) makes me think of a butcher shop.” On the other side, B. Amore claimed, “When I compare Gibson’s film to the films and plays I saw in my Catholic school, his was in full color and theirs was in pastels.” Gay Talese had “no movie like perception of the Passion.” However, both Gaurini and Sciamè said the

depiction was close to their perceptions. Sciamè went on further to say, “We can’t be revisionist about this. There was a Christ—we have proof of this. It was the story that I grew up with with some poetic license taken.”

In a side note, Gay Talese was the only one to comment on the acting in the film. “It was as wooden as the cross itself...Mary (his mother) had the same glazed grimace for an hour and a half.” He commented, “I can not believe that the mother of Christ would just sit there and not show any emotions.” He concluded, “If she were a Calabrese woman, she would have screamed and chased the Romans. She would have thrown rocks at the Romans and the Jews.” Then he added, “What was up with Jesus’ family? At least the Sopranos know how to take care of their own.”

A&I chose these members of the community, because they are leaders. Their views certainly represent the various opinions within the Italian American community. But the other reason for the choice is that they are articulate, thoughtful, and sometimes humorous.