

On "Pie Day," Consider Adding the Fruits of the Spirit to your Recipe

Anyone who knows me knows what a big fan of pie I am. Admittedly, anything with chocolate. In fact, as I write this, I'm thinking to myself "Rustic Inn is only about 2 1/2 hours on 35 north, and they'll have five layer chocolate, I can be back by 9." Well, maybe after Easter.

On the big "pie board" though at Easter you'll find many a fruit pie too; blueberry pies, cherry pies and their signature caramel apple pie (best served with vanilla ice cream).

I realize I probably shouldn't be going on about this during Lent, but bear with me, there's a segue here: and that's the fruits of the Spirit.

In recent years certain math folks have come to focus on March 14th as "pie day" due to the other pie, which is 3.14, or something to do with a circle. I'm not quite sure, math is my least favorite subject. Five out of four people have problems with math, and I'm one of them (I took that from a t-shirt).

However, while you won't find "Fruit of the Spirit" pie on the big board at Rustic Inn, do you know the fruits of the Spirit? A few years back Fr. Michael Van Sloan, a priest of our archdiocese, did an article on them that ran in the Catholic Spirit. Here's a refresher from his article (with some of my comments added). Lent is a great time to work on them.

Love. Agape love is the highest form of love, love for both God and neighbor. It is selfless, focused on the other person, given freely and gladly without condition or the expectation of repayment, expressed in service, and willing to suffer on another's behalf.

During Lent, we can ask ourselves do we really love as we should? Do we make time for God and one another? Do we will the good of one another and help them through both charity, but also through trying to help them become better people? Do we welcome their guidance as well on our journey? Do we do things with an asterisk or expect something in repayment all the time?

Joy. Joy is an interior contentment that comes from being close to God and in right relationship with others. Joy also comes with speaking and upholding the truth, honesty and integrity in relationships, enduring hardships, and decent conduct.

Joy isn't fake happiness. It's an authentic peace that comes from a life of prayer, and peace with others. A good thing to think about in Lent is do we let go of grudges? Do we make time for prayer in our daily lives, knowing that while life brings challenges, we are not battling things alone?

Peace. Peace is the harmony that occurs when justice prevails. It happens when resources are shared equitably, power is used for service, interdependence is fostered,

information is shared openly and honestly, the dignity of each person is respected, legitimate differences are tolerated, the disadvantaged receive help, hurts are forgiven and the common good is upheld.

Peace is something we all want; we are all aware of the horrors of war going on now in the Ukraine. How can we be an agent of peace? I think peace can be fostered when we try to make this world a better place through acts of love and mercy. But how about in our own lives and our families? Maybe use Lent to find internal peace by forgiving yourself and others and going to confession. Bring about peace in the family by talking through things. Bring about peace with your neighbor by not harboring grudges or being angry over someone's political differences. We bring about peace by forgiving too. Or maybe there's something we haven't addressed that is causing friction; we're not at peace because we need to address something going on in our lives or families like something from the past that was never talked about or hiding a "double life" with something we feel can't be talked about. Start with turning our struggles and battles over to God, and work on letting them go and reaching out to people who will help you find peace, while doing the same for them.

Patience. Patience is the virtue of suffering interruption or delay with composure and without complaint; to suffer annoyance, insult or mistreatment with self-restraint, refusing to be provoked; and to suffer burdens and difficult tasks with resolve and determination. It is also the willingness to slow down for another's benefit, to set aside one's personal plans and concerns, to go at another's pace, and to take whatever time is necessary to address their need.

How impatient we all are these days. Sometimes it's waiting for something to arrive like Ralphie and his Little Orphan Annie decoder ring. But do you find yourself impatient with people? The guy on the road driving who is on the phone or going 55 in the left lane with a line of cars behind him? Perhaps that coworker or your boss. Or maybe it's people who aren't catechized all that well and never go to Mass or misconstrue what the Church teaches, and you're trying to get them to come to Mass and getting more and more aggravated with them about why they believe (or don't believe) what they do. Maybe you are impatient with yourself for making the same mistakes. Never give up on yourself or others! Use Lent to grow in this virtue by realizing we are human, and growth takes a lifetime and continues after death - a lot longer than 40 days!

Kindness. Kindness is a warm and friendly disposition toward another. A kind person is polite and well mannered, respectful and considerate, pleasant and agreeable, cheerful and upbeat, caring and helpful, positive and complimentary.

As humans we are, I think, getting a little more ornery out there. We can want it "our way" all the time. We can lose empathy. Think of the big difference a random act of kindness can show; your patience with the person on the phone calling you to let you know about insurance for your car; a kind word to the clerk or waitress; saying something uplifting to your spouse or your children; or doing something kind for a neighbor. Use Lent to make kindness greater in your life.

Generosity. Generosity is a bigheartedness grounded in an abundance mentality. It is unselfish and expresses itself in sharing. It is extended to family and friends, strangers, and particularly those in need, and is offered not only as money, food and clothing, but also as time shared and assistance provided.

Generosity means more than writing a check. I think we can be generous by giving of our time, talent and treasure to our parish, to our families, to our communities. The Holy Spirit gives us gifts too and we are meant to share them with everyone.

Faithfulness. Faithfulness is demonstrated by loyalty to friends, duties performed, promises kept, commitments fulfilled, contracts completed, vows observed and being true to one's word.

Have you ever said "yes" and then not followed through on something? Sometimes we do that with God or with loved ones. God is always faithful and never leaves us. Maybe we can use Lent to look at how we are treating God and neighbor. Do we faithfully pray and come to Mass and enter into the Mass? Or how about family? People can be tough especially ones we live with. When a loved one is going through a valley, do we remain faithful and try to help them? Are we faithfully doing our part around the house and helping family members to grow as people?

Gentleness. Gentleness is sensitivity for another person. It is concerned with another's welfare, safety and security. It is grounded in humility. The approach is careful, tender, considerate, affectionate and mild-mannered, free of all pushiness, roughness or abrasiveness.

Life is hard. Sometimes we say, "how are you doing?" and it's a statement not a question. Empathy is important. We need to remember maybe our kids aren't "fine" or are having an outburst because their friend talked about them behind their back, the teacher called on them and they didn't know the answer, and they had a lousy day at school. Maybe someone is still grieving the loss of a loved one after a long time has passed and something triggered a memory. Or a coworker is having a lousy day. Gentleness is also important to respond to people who are difficult. When we respond to negativity with gentleness, it puts someone on their heels a bit and makes them think. So rather than always looking for an argument or fight with those who are difficult, maybe listen and offer to pray with them and throw them a real curve ball.

Self-control. Self-control is self-mastery regardless of the circumstances, to be in control of oneself rather than to be controlled by temptations, events or other people, especially when under pressure or in times of crisis. It is to remain calm, cool and collected, reasonable and even-tempered; to be alert and conscious, to proceed with caution and prudence, and to avoid an impulse or knee-jerk response; to be a moderating influence; and to have the strength and courage to reject evil and choose good.

It's easy for things to get out of control; for some it's drugs or alcohol or gambling; it could be things like social media, screen time, other things we do for pleasure. Or it's our temper. "Oh yeah! I'll show him!" We get angry at the politician; our kid's teacher because our kid can do no wrong; the coach who wouldn't play our kid or isn't aware that they are the best player. Or we jump to a conclusion on something or maybe don't think something through like "can I really afford this" before clicking "order." Self-control, with the virtue we call "temperance" that helps us control our desires, is also great to work on during Lent.

While I'm quite aware Pentecost is a couple of months away, if you think about it Lent is a great time to work on these important things in our lives so we can grow as individuals.

I'm not into fruit pie. But I am into Five Layer Chocolate pie. Available "up north" at the Rustic Inn. Each layer comes together to make a perfect slice. And of course, the flaky crust.

In our lives, the Holy Spirit gives us these fruits too, each important in its own way - far more so than pie. So, if you are so inclined for some pie on the 14th, go for it. But every day, especially in Lent, go for the fruits of the Spirit that help us truly grow in grace and gives us lasting happiness that doesn't end when the last bite of pie has been devoured.

God's blessings to you!

- Fr. Paul