

AND GOD SAID
Let's Eat!



*Amusing and
Thought-Provoking Parallels
Between the Bible and Food*

Gary Graf

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AND GOD SAID, "LET'S EAT!"

Amusing and Thought-Provoking Parallels Between the Bible and Food

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Menu

INTRODUCTION: Restaurant Review	7
CHAPTER ONE: All the Ingredients for a Good Meal—and a Good Life	13
CHAPTER TWO: You Are Cordially Invited	21
CHAPTER THREE: Banquets and Festivals and Feasts, Oh My!	27
CHAPTER FOUR: Living Waters	35
CHAPTER FIVE: Bread of Life	45
CHAPTER SIX: Lessons from Butter, Oil and Vinegar	57
CHAPTER SEVEN: Appetizers and Biblical Morsels	67
CHAPTER EIGHT: Fruit and Being Fruitful	81
CHAPTER NINE: For Every Seasoning, Turn, Turn, Turn	99
CHAPTER TEN: Beef: It's What's in the Bible	113
CHAPTER ELEVEN: Fowl Play	131
CHAPTER TWELVE: The Other White Meat	149
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Lamb and the Lamb of God	163
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Fishers of Men and Menus	177
CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Fruit of the Vine	191
CHAPTER SIXTEEN: Scriptural Moderation	209
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: Curds and the Way	213
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: The Land of Milk and Honey	221
CHAPTER NINETEEN: The Most Wonderful Meal of All	227
NOTES	235

FEASTS ARE MADE FOR LAUGHTER.

ECCLESIASTES 10:19

Restaurant Review

One does not live by bread alone. (Matthew 4:4)

If the Bible has anything to say about it, there are plenty of other wonderful things to eat besides bread in this world. With references to everything from coriander and cinnamon to pomegranates and lamb, the Good Book could very easily be called the Food Book.

Not only were food and wine a large part of the social and religious customs of biblical times, but Jesus and the prophets often used them to explain spiritual concepts to the people. Many of the Lord's teachings came over a meal. Two of his most famous miracles involved loaves and fish. Perhaps the most recognized food reference is that Christ's own mysterious gifts to humankind—his Body and Blood—are expressed in bread and wine.

In my previous books I used sports—baseball, football, and golf—to help break open the Word of God. But as time passed, and the more I thought about it, I came to believe that a book about how food and wine sustain body and soul might offer even greater insight into Scripture.

For those of you who have been faithful followers of my *And God Said* series, this book represents something of a departure. However, as Jesus said to Peter, "Do not be afraid." And as St. Julian of Norwich said 635 years ago, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

Rest assured, these days I still faithfully follow the sports teams of my youth, but my interests have expanded. Travel has now taken its place among my favorite pastimes. In fact, my sister and

I have combined our love of baseball with the lure of the road by taking trips to Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, San Diego, and more to catch ballgames at various stadiums and dine at notable establishments around the country. Sweltering temperatures at Turner Field were paired with down-home cooking at Sylvia's. Kansas City offered the fountains of Kaufman Stadium and the ribs of Arthur Bryant, home of some of the country's finest barbecue. Beantown combined the traditions of venerable Fenway Park with a pail of delectable onion rings at Jacob Wirth's. The Motor City revealed the new Comerica Park with the many Mediterranean treats of Greek Town.

So, as my Rand-McNally summary above (and the title of this book) suggest, I've also taken an interest in food. More specifically, fine dining. Okay, fine wining and dining, not to mention fine preparation and cooking. For that I have, in part, my mother to thank. Even at eighty-seven, she makes a wonderful turkey dinner with all the fixings, homemade spaghetti sauce with meatballs to die for, and beans and ham that is still my favorite meal of all time.

Honesty compels me to point out that despite her many delectable dishes, there were occasional mealtime misses. For all her mastery of Italian cuisine, my mom would inevitably turn out a hamburger that would make the National Hockey League proud. That is, these particular burgers were puck-worthy. Then there was the time she mistakenly shaped meatballs not with lean ground beef but with similarly wrapped ground-meat scraps from the butcher (intended for our dog). This caused all sorts of canine howling by the two-legged members of our family at our dinner table. Yet, given my

mother's first specialty as a newlywed, most would conclude she's come a long way on the culinary trail. In those early years, she served my dad and his buddies mean *crudités*. Pronounced "kroo-di-tay," the French-inspired dish sounded darn impressive to my young, Anglicized ears, until I learned that it's a fancy name for raw carrots, celery, radishes, and other vegetables served as appetizers.

My appreciation for food came at a relatively early age. Growing up in Millbrae, California, a suburb of San Francisco, bread was delivered right to our door. I can remember opening a fresh loaf of Wonder Bread and dunking a slice into my mom's spaghetti sauce while she was cooking. Or receiving a buttered slice of bread with sugar, rolled up like a delicate pastry. Talk about your slice of heaven! Soon fried baloney sandwiches with French's yellow mustard became the paragon of all lunchtime meals and the reason, in my mind at least, that lunchmeat was created in the first place. My dad's barbecued chicken and spareribs became lip-smacking, finger-licking summertime pleasures. From there, my love of food just sort of (Hostess) snowballed.

As my earlier books relate, I am by no means a scriptural scholar, only a searcher seeking better understanding of how to grow closer to God each day. Regarding sports, all too often my knowledge

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of the games has eclipsed my abilities to play them, especially the one involving clubs, holes, hazards, and traps. Concerning cuisine, however, I'm happy to report an undiminished appetite for a deliciously prepared meal. I've been fortunate to dine in some of the most renowned restaurants in the country. Even more important—and perhaps more astounding—is the fact that I am a decent cook. Really. Not chef material, mind you, but I've been known to serve some rather, there's just no other way to say it, wonderful meals.

By way of example, I've turned out a pretty tasty shrimp tempura in my day (not without covering light switches, faucet fixtures, stove knobs, and pan handles with batter); prepared beef chili for forty hungry campers; grilled a sumptuous steak or two; and, just last night, served Veal Saltimbocca a la Gary that my guests proclaimed "fabulous," without my even holding a paring knife at their throats.

Just as some menus advise that a chocolate soufflé takes twenty minutes to prepare, I too have an admission. As a Catholic, I have taken a Christian approach to the lessons, stories, and recipes included in this book. That is, while I certainly refer to the foods of the Old and New Testament, my approach is admittedly non-kosher. My goal is not to explain dietary restrictions put forth in Scripture, but to rejoice in the learning that comes through the Bible's love of food.

Armed with a curiosity about Scripture and a soupçon of talent in the kitchen, I believe we have all the ingredients we need to travel to the land of milk and honey; to learn about lamb and the Lamb of God; to read about feasts with fatted calves and recipes for veal scaloppine; to partake of Washington state wines and quench spiritual thirsts. In short, whether it's a good meal or the Good News,

there's a great deal we can celebrate together. Come to the table and enjoy!

**PS**

Having revised this introduction one Saturday, I happened to go to that evening's Mass at St. Anne's on Queen Anne Hill in Seattle. Lo and behold, the gospel antiphon contained the very words I open the book with: *One does not live by bread alone*. Not only that, the gospel reading featured the miracle of loaves and fish. Coincidence? Perhaps. But I like to think that it's a sign from our gastronomic God that faith and food have a place in these pages after all.

All the Ingredients for a Good Meal—and a Good Life

Some meals are easy to fix. Take a grilled cheese sandwich for instance. A little bit of butter, two slices of bread, a couple of slices of cheddar, and you're pleased to cheese. Preparing timpano, the signature dish from the movie *The Big Night*, however, is another recipe altogether.

In that movie, two Italian brothers host a feast for the ages, featuring one sumptuous specialty after another. Highlighting the evening is an incredible meal within a meal—a timpano, which takes its name from the Italian word for timpani, the kettledrum shape it resembles. Think of a timpano as a gigantic potpie made out of pasta. Inside is layer upon stratified layer of different Italian delicacies, from lunchmeats to pasta to chicken to boiled eggs to meatballs to ragu to cheeses to peas to artichoke hearts to whatever the chef conjures up. Consider a wedge of a well-made timpano to be the mother lode for an epicurean geologist.

However, even some of the ingredients of a timpano have their own ingredients. Homemade pasta requires flour, eggs, salt, olive oil, and water. Meatballs are made of ground beef, pork or veal; bread-crumbs; eggs; garlic, onion, parsley, or other herbs; grated cheeses; and salt and pepper to taste.

Fortunately, whether we need a handful of ingredients to grill cheese or a veritable cornucopia's worth for baking the ultimate deep dish, we have God the Creator to thank for providing us all the food we require for our fridge and all the provisions we need for our pantry.

From the first pages of the Bible, we learn that God created all that is in six days. On the first day, God made the heavens and the earth; on the second, light was separated from darkness, giving us night and day. Subsequently, the waters were parted from the sky and then water from dry land. It was during this third day that God said, *"Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees*

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of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:11-12).

When most people think of *fruit trees of every kind*, they may call to mind apple, peach, plum, cherry, orange, pear, or banana trees. A varied—if modest—list. But apple trees alone show our Creator's abundant generosity. Go to the green grocer, and we can find Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Fuji, Jona-

golts, and a handful of other apple varieties, far more types than any other kind of fruit. Yet this doesn't even come close to the bottom of the bushel basket. Believe it or not, there are about 7,500 different kinds of apple trees.¹ Not only did God grant us enough apples a day to keep the doctors away, God did so all around the world.

Akane apples originated in Japan; Anna in Israel; Annurca in Italy; and Antonovka in Russia. Belle de Boskoop came from the Netherlands; Braeburn from New Zealand; and Caville Blanc from

France. Australia gave us the Pink Lady; Germany the Gravenstein; Ireland the Irish Peace; Scotland the James Grieve; Sweden the Katy; and Ontario, Canada, the McIntosh. Closer to home, the Rome Beauty hails from New York; the Baldwin from Massachusetts; the Arkansas Black from, you guessed it, Arkansas; the Cameo from Washington; the Enterprise from Illinois (not Starfleet Command as many believe); the Honeygold from Minnesota; the Idared from Idaho; the Lodi from Ohio; and the Paula Red from the home of Big Blue, Michigan.²

As a side note, during a portion of my twenty-fourth summer, I happened to work in a fruit warehouse in Yakima, Washington, during the apple season. Red Delicious to be exact. My job was to clean up amidst all the washers, sorting tables, conveyor belts, and packing crates. As yet another example of God's creativity, amidst the tens of thousands of apples that were processed, I found one that was three-quarters Red Delicious, one-eighth Golden Delicious, and one-eighth Gravenstein, perfectly delineated as if it were a three-dimensional pie—or in this case *apple*—chart.

As for other fruits and vegetation, we need only traipse to our neighborhood corner store or supermarket for a vast and colorful array of foodstuffs. Living in Seattle, I am fortunate to be close to the historic Pike Place Market, a one-hundred-year-old collection of stalls and stores featuring the freshest foods and flowers and the most creative arts and crafts. On a stroll home from work one late afternoon in early summer, I made note of God's bounty on display at one of my favorite fruit and produce stands.

Arranged as if by a compulsive green grocer, displays of neatly—no, make that precisely—placed fruits and vegetables, herbs, and

legumes ran along an L-shaped stall. Moving from right to left, top to bottom, I recorded the following (take a deep breath before reading): baking potatoes, sweet Vidalia onions, red onions, yellow onions, white onions, cioppolini onions, shallots, ginger root, cabbage, red cabbage, limes, lemons, tomatillos, spinach, Swiss chard, escarole, curly endive, jicama, poblano peppers, jalapeno peppers, parsnips, cucumbers, red peppers, green peppers, yellow peppers, orange peppers, eggplant, yellow squash, zucchini, elephant garlic, garlic, basil, mint, oregano, thyme, rosemary, dill, baby carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, snap peas, sugar snap peas, celery root, celery, broccolini, iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, green leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuce, butter lettuce, baby bok choy, carrots, arugula, green beans, radicchio, frisee, beefsteak tomatoes, roma tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, red grapes, green grapes, pistachio nuts, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, avocados (with a handmade sign saying *Pleeza, No Squeeza*), rhubarb, sweet corn, garlic spears, figs, asparagus, fennel, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, pineapple, radishes, red potatoes, mangoes, bananas, Yukon gold potatoes, Rainier cherries, Bing cherries, fava beans, white peaches, prunes, kumquats, nectarines, peaches, pears, champagne grapes, apricots, portabella mushrooms, crimini mushrooms, button mushrooms, morel mushrooms, shitake mushrooms, Granny Smith apples, Pink Lady apples, navel oranges and, lest we forget, kiwis.

Now back to Scripture. After painting the nighttime sky with stars, God gave creation two great lights—the sun and the moon—to rule the day and the night respectively. By the time the fifth day rolled around, God rolled up those celestial sleeves and went to work, say-

ing, *“Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly across the dome of the sky.”* So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:20-21).

On the next day—with an eye to the future, and possibly a good steak—God said, *“Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.”* And it was so...And God saw that it was good (Genesis 24-25).

Pike Place Market’s four fish vendors offer nearly every kind of aquatic life with which the waters swarm: Red King salmon, White King Salmon, Sockeye Salmon, Coho Salmon, Steelhead Salmon, lobster, prawns, clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, crab, halibut, ling cod, true cod, black cod, Dover sole, Petrale sole, monkfish, tilapia, yellowfin tuna, albacore tuna, swordfish, marlin, snapper, trout, finnan haddie (cured haddock), mackerel, catfish, and calamari. While the Market’s two butchers presented bacon, ham hocks, ham, Polish sausage, chorizo sausage, ground beef, homemade pork sausage, old-fashioned franks, bratwurst, ground lamb, breakfast link sausage, hot Italian sausage, mild Italian sausage, extra-lean ground beef, chicken Italian sausage, leg of lamb, lamb shanks, lamb chops, rib roast of lamb, veal shoulder roast, veal chops, veal cutlets, pork chops, pork tenderloin, baby back ribs, spareribs, rib loin roast, pork shoulder roast, T-bone steaks, New York steaks, sirloin steak, beef tenderloin, eye or round roast, rib-eye roast, rib-eye steak, flank steak, rabbit, duck, quail, capons, game hens, beef stew meat, beef oxtails, top round, corned beef, chuck roast, beef brisket, short ribs, chicken

breasts, stuffed Cornish game hens, chicken thighs, chicken wings, chicken legs, fryers, free range chickens, lamb kidneys, beef tongue and beef liver.

Whew!

Not only did God create all that there is—from meat and potatoes to the ever-expanding universe—it was all created for us:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them..."See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food...And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (Genesis 1:27, 29-31).

Not only did God give us every seed and fruit, fish and animal for food, God gave us ten thousand or so taste buds—replaced every couple of weeks—with which to enjoy a myriad of tastes and flavors.³ With all those buds, we are well equipped to distinguish the five generally accepted taste sensations: sweet, bitter, savory, salty, and sour.⁴

After bringing forth gardens and galaxies, God took the next day off. *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation (Genesis 2: 1-3).*

As all Christians know, the seventh day came to be known as Sunday, our Sabbath, the day of worship, when we celebrate Mass as a community, break open the Word of God, and receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine. Over the years, Sunday has also become a time when families gather for a meal to share stories, relive experiences, and otherwise secure the bonds that tie us together as family and friends.

Whether Sunday was created as a day of worship or as a time to break bread, God only knows. But one thing is certain. God has generously given us all we need to prepare everything from a breakfast to a banquet; God has given us, via the Bible, every ingredient we need for an abundant spiritual life. What's more, by paying attention to the many foods revealed in the Good Book, we can learn to feed our souls and enjoy many a good meal while doing so.

