

From The Kitchen at St. Francis Friary, Los Angeles

Last Spring I officially became a postulant for the priesthood in the Diocese of Los Angeles and began my seminary studies last Fall at Bloy House, the diocesan theological school based at the Claremont School of Theology. That's where I met Christopher. We share a similar sense of humor and became fast friends. We keep each other sane when the stress level rises, and he has become an important part of my wider circle of support. One day at lunch we were bickering with each other, playfully of course, and the Dean asked, Are you two brothers separated at birth? I love that.

So I went over to Christopher's place one night for dinner. I'm standing there in his kitchen chatting away while hes hard at work, not really sure what hes making but enjoying the show. I love watching other people cook. I find it a comforting and safe place for me emotionally. It probably comes from watching my mother cook when I was young. I could spend hours just marveling at the way she wielded a knife, and how she just knew when to add things to the pot. I felt connected to her in those moments. It was like she was letting me in on her secret life in the kitchen. And I have fond memories of the two of us sitting together in front of the television and watching Julia Child on PBS, and talking about the things she was preparing. Does this make me a voyeur..?

Anyway, at one point Christopher got exasperated. He had been sauteing some zucchini and summer squash, and had just added some chicken to the pot when he realized that the zucchini was gonna get overcooked before the chicken was done. I started thinking on my feet, using some of that expensive culinary school education, and we were able to figure out how to change our thinking about the dish and make it work. The big lesson of the night? Butter can fix anything. So, with apologies to Christopher, here's my version of our memorable meal. (Hey Christopher: If you're reading this, and you'd better be, you'll have to come over to the friary soon so we can try it out!)

Christopher's Chicken in Zucchini and Butter Sauce

Halve a large onion lengthwise through the root end and save one half for another use. Cut the other half of the onion into half again lengthwise, not cutting through the root this time. Slice the onion across that cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pieces. Slice one zucchini and one summer squash into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick rounds. Mince 2 cloves of garlic. Reserve all of this for use in a bit.

Next cut two skinless, boneless chicken breast halves into large chunks. Season them with salt and pepper and dust them in flour. Heat two tablespoons of oil in a large pan with a lid set over medium high heat. Cook the chicken pieces until almost cooked through and well browned for about 3 minutes per side. Remove from the pan and reserve.

Add another tablespoon of oil to the pan and sauté the onion until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the zucchini, summer squash, and garlic. Season this with salt, pepper, and a teaspoon of dried thyme. Cover the pan with a lid and cook until soft, stirring occasionally – about 5 more minutes. Add a quarter cup of chicken broth or stock. When it's boiling (which should happen quickly since it's only a ¼ cup of liquid), add the reserved chicken and any accumulated juices to the pan. Cover with the lid again and heat this all through well, about 2 more minutes.

Turn off the heat and stir in the juice of half a lemon. Now swirl in 2 Tablespoons of cold, unsalted butter. This is called “mounting” the sauce with butter, which in culinary school was described as “dissolving but not melting” the butter. This gives the sauce a beautiful creamy texture and rounds out the flavor. Speaking of which, taste the sauce and adjust for salt and pepper. Serve this with a rice pilaf and a mixed green salad.

Easy. Comforting. And with a glass of wine and the company of a good friend, what more could you need?