

From The Kitchen at St. Francis Friary, Los Angeles

When I lived at San Damiano Friary in San Francisco during my Novitiate it always seemed we had potatoes on hand. I guess it was one of those things that was easy for folks to donate. Certainly during the holidays we would get enormous bags of the stuff, but really throughout the year they would periodically appear. Br. Jude, who is a Jungian analyst and a Spiritual Director, would sometimes get potatoes and other produce from clients as payment. (I fondly remember the time someone gave him a bag full of different colored baby carrots as payment. That was some good eatin'.) Sometimes we'd get them when Br. Robert Hugh or one of the other friars volunteered at a local food pantry. In any case, they were ALWAYS around.

One morning I decided to make potato pancakes for myself for breakfast. I've never been one to go for a bowl of sugary cereal, and I like the process of actually cooking, so it was rather inevitable that potatoes would figure in to my morning routine at some point. I had some extras sitting around and, lo, they were a hit. Somehow over time it became a Sunday morning tradition that I would get up early and make a batch of latkes for the household. And I even started to do them at night for our dinner, served with a salad of course to balance it out. I guess it's become one of my signature things 'cause now Br. Jude always jokes when he plans to make a pastoral visit that he expects latkes to be waiting for him when he arrives – which often (though not always) is the case. And even Br. Robert, when he came to visit for a few days, asked if I had kept up the old Sunday morning tradition.

Give these a try. Maybe they'll become a tradition for you, too. And not just during Hannukah....

Latkes And Applesauce

Make the applesauce: Peel, core and chop 4 medium apples – whatever variety you have on hand. I like to mix tart and sweet apples, but it depends on what we get at the Food Bank. Place the apples in a pot with a stick of cinnamon, 1 teaspoon of brown sugar, a pinch of salt, the grated zest and juice of 1 lime, ¼ cup of water, and a few gratings of nutmeg (or about ¼ teaspoon of pre-ground nutmeg). Stir well and bring all of this to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer, cover the pot, and cook until the apples are soft enough to crush with a fork. Do the crushing until it reaches your desired consistency, then taste and adjust the

sweetness. Transfer to a serving bowl, cover with plastic wrap pressed directly on the surface, and allow to chill in the refrigerator until ready to use, up to 2 days. (Note that a nice variation is to substitute a lemon or an orange for the lime – which will affect the sweetness of your end product, so be sure to taste and adjust that at the end!)

Make the latkes: Take 4 medium russet potatoes, which is about 1 ½ pounds, and scrub them well under running water. With the skin still on grate 3 of the potatoes on the large side of a box grater and grate the remaining potato on the finer side. Place the grated potatoes in a bowl of very cold (but not iced) water. Take half a large onion and grate that on the large side of the box grater, and transfer that to the same bowl of water. Allow that to sit in the water for at least 15 minutes and up to an hour.

Meanwhile, crack 2 large eggs into a bowl. Add 1/3 cup of all-purpose flour, 1 ½ teaspoons of salt, ½ teaspoon ground black pepper, ¼ teaspoon of cayenne pepper, and a generous grating of nutmeg (or about ¼ teaspoon of pre-ground nutmeg). Whisk this all together. It should be a fairly thick “batter.”

Drain the potato and onion mixture and squeeze out as much liquid as possible with your hands. Transfer this to the bowl with the egg mixture and combine well with a spatula. It will seem REALLY thick. That’s a good thing. As the mixture sits the potatoes and onions will continue to release a little liquid that will loosen it up. But in any case, thick is good and holds together really well as you fry the latkes in a preheated pan with about a scant ¼ inch of oil in it set over a medium heat. Just spoon out some of the mixture into the oil and flatten it into cakes. Fry the latkes about 5 minutes on the first side until nicely browned. Flip the latkes and fry about 3-4 minutes on the second side. Drain well and keep in a 200 degree Fahrenheit oven on a rack set in a baking sheet until all the latkes have been cooked.

This recipe should make about sixteen to eighteen 3-½ inch latkes. It’s best to serve the latkes right away with the applesauce and some sour cream on the side for garnishing. If I’m making these for breakfast at the friary that’s not a problem, but if I’m serving them for dinner I make them all ahead and keep them warm in the oven until Evening Prayer is over. For dinner it’s good to serve a green salad alongside, just to cut through the richness.

~Br. Simon