

From The Kitchen at St. Francis Friary, Los Angeles

So I was wandering around the kitchen today wondering what to eat. Everyone else is out – Brs. Tom and Ivanildo at a meeting of clergy serving Latino congregations, and Br. Ambrose at CPE class at the hospital. I had just finished Midday Prayer and was alone in the friary with Stanley the dog and Pepper the cat eyeing me suspiciously. I literally was walking in circles, hungry but not wanting to do a big production for just one person. That's when I noticed the bag of potatoes on the counter from last week's Food Bank.

My mind started racing. Latkes are one of my go-to recipes, but I didn't feel like frying today – or making some applesauce to go with it. Then I opened a cupboard and saw the cans of Corn that also came from the Food Bank. And then I hit on it: Corn and Potato Chowder! I started gathering my ingredients and was going to head down a fairly straightforward route, but as I started cooking I thought, why not go Mexican? Living in L.A. the heady flavors of chile, cumin and cilantro have really grown on me. I looked around to see what we had in the pantry and what was growing in the Community Garden that is being run out of the friary's backyard. Here is what I came up with:

“Mexican” Corn and Potato Chowder

Peel and dice 2 medium potatoes and reserve them in a bowl of water.

Drain 1 can of whole kernel corn and reserve.

Prepare 2 cups of chicken broth and reserve. (I usually use chicken base in a jar. You could also use vegetable broth here.)

Put a saucepan over medium high heat. Dice ½ of a medium onion, 1 small carrot, and 1 rib of celery, and mince 1 large clove of garlic. Saute these in the pan along with 1 bay leaf in 1 ½ Tablespoons of olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and cook for about 5 minutes until the onion goes translucent.

To the pan add:

½ tsp. dried thyme

1 tsp. dried oregano

¼ tsp. ground turmeric

½ tsp. ground California chile (or other variety of ground chile)

1 tsp. ground cumin

1 chipotle pepper in adobo, chopped

1 serrano pepper, seeded and deveined, and minced

Once all of that is well mixed and aromatic, which should only take a minute, drain the potatoes and add them to the pot. Season with some more salt and pepper and stir to coat them well in all the seasonings.

Next add 1 ½ teaspoons of flour and stir for a minute to cook out that raw flavor. Add the reserved chicken broth and turn up the heat to high. Stir it well. Once it comes to a boil reduce the heat to a simmer and allow to cook for about 5 minutes. The potatoes will be about 2/3 of the way cooked. Add 1 cup of whole milk (or you can substitute plain soy milk) and the reserved corn. Again bring it to a boil, then simmer for a couple of minutes until the chowder is thick, the potatoes are cooked thoroughly, and the corn is tender.

Stir in about a Tablespoon each of chopped cilantro and parsley, and one stalk of scallion that has also been chopped. Taste and adjust the seasoning, and serve the chowder with shredded cheddar cheese on the side. This would go great with some fried tortilla strips on the side, or some crusty bread. Today I just grabbed some crackers out of the cupboard.

This was a perfect amount of chowder. It would have served two with enough for seconds. I was so pleased that much of what I used came from either the Food Bank or the Community Garden. We are truly blessed to have such resources available to us.

Just a quick side note. In the recipe you will see that I have offered some alternatives if you are making this for a vegan or vegetarian. The chowder is thickened with a flour-based roux. If you are serving someone who is allergic to gluten you can thicken this by using instant mashed potato flakes, which we also happen to have around from the Food Bank. So omit the flour and instead stir in ¼ cup of the flakes when the broth comes up to a boil.

I hope you try this recipe. Let me know what you think if you do!

~Br. Simon