

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

“**E**at Parade,” Italy’s first TV show about food on RAI 2 every Friday from 1:30 to 1:50 PM, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. The brainchild of its host Bruno Gambacorta, trained as a medical doctor before succumbing to his passion for journalism, each episode is usually divided into four segments: a chef explaining his recipe for a seasonal dish; an aspect of viticulture or of a specific wine or winemaker; a preview of the upcoming week’s food-related events throughout Italy; and a listing of new food, wine, and travel books.

It was on “Eat Parade” that I first heard of *A tavola con Papa Francesco: Il cibo nella vita di Jorge Mario Bergoglio* (meaning: *At Pope Francis’ Table: Food in the Life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio*), published in January 2018 by Mondadori (19.90 euros). Its author, Roberto Alborghetti, is a journalist with Bergamo’s newspaper *L’Eco*. He’s also written numerous biographies of saints as well as three volumes dedicated to the life and teachings of Pope Francis: *Francesco: Nessuno resti indietro* (“Let No One Stay Behind”); and *Come chicchi in una spiga di grano* (“Like Kernels in a Head of Wheat”), all only available in Italian.

“Although *A tavola con Papa Francesco* has not yet been translated into English,” Daniela Giustacchini of Mondadori’s Press Office wrote me in an e-mail dated March 23, “editions are available in Spanish (Larousse), French (Bayard Presse), Dutch (Kosmos-KOK), German (Random House, Verlagsgesellschaft), Hungarian and Polish (Kossuth). It’s a three-for-the-price-of-one volume: a biography of Pope Francis, his philosophy about mealtimes: especially the joy of hospitality, his conviction that everyone should have enough to eat everywhere in the world, his strategy for not wasting food, as well as his 36 favorite (to cook and to eat) recipes, all photographed. Eight are his particular favorites: *calamari ripieni* and *risotto alla piemontese* are childhood memories; *asado* (roasted meat Argentine-style) and *empanadas* (similar to the Neapolitan *calzone*) date to his seminary years; *maccheroni al forno con ragù* and *mozzarella di bufala* and *pizza with bufala e pomodorini gialli* were often served during his many prison or soup kitchen visits; *pan di spagna*

AT POPE FRANCIS’ TABLE

“I LIKE TO SIT AT THE DINNER TABLE WITH THE POOR, BECAUSE THEY SERVE FOOD, BUT THEY ALSO SHARE THEIR HEARTS. INSTEAD, SOMETIMES A RICHER PERSON ONLY SHARES HIS FOOD...”

—POPE FRANCIS



with a heart of mate (the cake prepared by Francesco Maria Ceravolo, owner of the pastry shop *Hedera* on Borgo Pio, for Francis’ 80th birthday), and *putizza*, an Eastern European strudel he asked Melania Trump if she made for her husband Donald.

But above all Pope Francis has a biblical passion for bread. “It’s made directly by God and therefore is a kind of ‘superfood,’ an excellent remedy for all the afflictions of body and soul,” Pope Francis told Alborghetti. “If, when I was a child, a piece of bread fell on the floor, we were taught to pick it up immediately and to kiss it. We never threw bread away. It’s a symbol of God’s love for you, of the God who gives you food.”

As soon as he was elected Pope, the world press spilled much ink about Bergoglio’s pre-papacy lifestyle while he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires: how he lived by himself in a modest apartment near the cathedral, cooked for himself and ate alone unless a nearby order of nuns invited him for the traditional Piemontese dish *bagna càuda*, the subject of my February 2014 “Food For Thought”: “*Bagna Càuda: Pope Francis’ Favorite Dish*.”

Then as Pope, it’s well known that he preferred another modest apartment in the Vatican’s guesthouse, *Casa Santa Maria*, to the papal apartments; that he eats his meals with the *Casa*’s other guests; carries his own hand luggage on trips; and drives to parish visits in a second-hand car. “However,” writes Alborghetti, “not everyone knows that as a child Bergoglio dreamed of becoming a butcher; that he learned to love cooking, especially for holidays, from his grandmother Rosa; and that, before studying theology, he received a university degree in food chemistry and loved to cook for his fellow students both there and later at the Jesuit seminary, *Collegio Máximo di San Miguel*.”

In short, this volume is a portrait of Pope Francis via his rapport with agriculture and his respect for farmland and the farmer, his “fight” for the availability of a healthy diet for all mankind, and the importance of conviviality, illustrated by his favorite recipes from throughout his lifetime, and his wishing “*Buon appetito*” to the crowd below in St. Peter’s Square at the end of his Sunday *Angelus* prayer. ☺



From left: risotto alla piemontese, calamari ripieni and alfajores cakes. Above, the Italian edition of *At Pope Francis’ Table: Food in the Life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio*, published by Mondadori