

An Italian Christmas Eve; a Feast for any Seafood Lover

(Originally published 12/2006)

by John Rizzo

I was too young to remember when the anticipation of the Christmas Eve dinner overcame the anticipation of Christmas gifts; this meal is truly a favorite in our family. Although I am only part Italian, I'm grateful that our family continued the tradition of the Christmas Eve feast.

The history is a little unclear; there are numerous explanations of the origin as well as the number of fish served (seven). Depending upon whom you ask, seven may represent the number of sacraments of the Catholic Church, the number of days for God to create the world, the seven days it took Mary and Joseph to reach Bethlehem or some may tell you it represents the seven hills of Rome. Some Italians will serve nine fish on Christmas Eve; the trinity times three. Others serve twelve for the apostles and some even thirteen; the twelve apostles plus Jesus. Regardless of how many fish are served; there is nothing like getting together with the family and celebrating Christmas with a magnificent feast of seafood and pasta.

White Fish Siciliano **Yield: 4 Servings**

White fish fillets	
–such as cod, flounder, tilapia, haddock	2 lbs.
Olive Oil	2 TBL
Garlic, Minced	1 tsp.
Fresh Bread	4 slices
Oregano	1 tsp.
Parsley, Chopped	2 tsp.
Parmesan Cheese, Grated	2 TBL

Under a low heat, simmer the garlic in the olive oil to release the flavor being careful not to burn it. Remove from heat and set aside. In a food processor or blender, process the fresh bread into bread crumbs (4 slices should yield 1.5 Cups). Transfer the bread crumbs to a mixing bowl and add the oil/garlic mixture, oregano and parsley. Using your fingers, mix the ingredients well. The bread should be slightly moist with oil, but not clumping. Add the parmesan cheese and blend well.

On a greased sheet pan or baking pan, lay the fish fillets skin side down. (Although the fish probably doesn't have it's skin, you can still tell which side the skin was on by the faint lines across the flesh. Depending upon the species of fish; the skin side is often noticeably flat in comparison.) Evenly top the fillets with the bread crumb mixture.

Bake at 450° F until the crumbs brown and the fish reaches an internal temperature of 140° F. If you don't have a thermometer, gently break a fillet open; if it flakes easily and is solid white in color, it is finished.