

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Why We Do That

Some time ago, Roger Aguinaldo handed me a small paperback book. “This is **really** interesting,” he said. “I thought you might want to do a column about it.” I thanked him and looked at the title: *Why Do Catholics Eat Fish on Friday? The Catholic Origin of Just About Everything*. My curiosity was piqued.

I finally got around to reading it. I am, in a word, amazed. This little book, by Michael P. Foley, is a gold mine. Among other things, the book lets us know that:

Catholics are responsible for the pretzel. (Personally, I couldn't be more proud.) In the fifth century, Roman Christians, to remind themselves that Lent was a time of prayer, baked these salty foods to resemble arms folded in prayer. The result was called *bracella*, Latin for “little arms.” From that comes the German *brezel* or pretzel.

Starbucks wouldn't exist without the Church. It was a seventeenth century capuchin monk, Marco D'Aviano, who invented cappuccino when he tried some Turkish coffee, found it too bitter, and added milk and honey, turning it the color of his habit. For this (and a few other reasons) D'Aviano was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2003.

Hollywood's real name is a lot longer, and it's dedicated to Mary. In 1769, a Franciscan priest came upon a large river in what we now know as southern California, and named it (take a deep breath) *El Río de Nuestra Señora La Reina de los Ángeles de Porciúncula*. This means: “The River of Our Lady, Queen of the Angels of Portiuncula.” The Portiuncula is the name of the chapel near Assisi where the Franciscan order was born. Eventually, the long Spanish name was shortened to simply “Los Angeles.”

It was a priest who invented television—and he wasn't Fulton Sheen. This is a real gee-whiz fact. It was an Italian-born priest named Abbe Castelli who, in 1862, proved that “variations of light could be transmitted down a telegraph wire as electrical impulses.” As a result, I now have a job. Thank you, Father Castelli.

American football wouldn't be the same without Catholics. Forget Notre Dame and the Fighting Irish for the moment. It was a Catholic coach, Roger Staubach of the Dallas Cowboys, who coined the term “Hail Mary Pass” to describe a desperate last-minute play that paid off and won the NFC Championship in 1975.

This stuff really is fascinating. The book describes how bowling began in church cloisters as a religious ritual; how the motto for the Olympics (“Faster, Higher, Stronger”) was coined by a French Dominican friar; how the letter “X” was used to represent Christ, and thus became a symbol of love at the end of a letter; and how the phrase “being born with a silver spoon in your mouth” has roots in ancient rituals for baptizing infants (rituals that at the time included giving the child First Communion with a silver spoon!).

I could go on. But better yet: Check out the book for yourself and see just how wide-ranging and far-reaching Catholicism has been over the last two thousand years. You'll find out just why Catholics **do** eat fish on Fridays; was it really to support fish merchants who had fallen on hard times?

Thank you, Roger. And thank you, Michael P. Foley. Because of you guys, I now realize that I never knew what I never knew!

©Deacon Greg Kandra, 2014

For more editions of “A View from the Pew”
visit ourladyqueenofmartyrs.org