

PRETZELS ?
FOR LENT ?

Yes, the pretzel has its origins as an official food of Lent.

In the early Church, the Lenten abstinence and fasting laws were much stricter than today. Many areas of the Church abstained from all forms of meat and animal products, while others made exceptions for food like fish. Pope St. Gregory, writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury, issued the following rule: *"We abstain from flesh, meat, and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese and eggs."* The general rule was for a person to have one meal a day, in the evening or at three o'clock in the afternoon, and smaller snacks to maintain strength. The need arose for a very simple food which would fulfill the abstinence and fasting laws.

According to pretzel maker Snyder's of Hanover, in the early 600's a young monk in Italy was preparing a special Lenten bread of water, flour and salt. To remind his brother monks that Lent was a time of prayer, he rolled the bread dough in strips and then shaped each strip in the form of crossed arms, mimicking the then popular prayer position of folding one's arms over each other on the chest. The bread was then baked as a soft bread, just like the big soft pretzels one can find today.

Because these breads were shaped into the form of crossed arms, they were called *bracellae*, the Latin word for "little arms." From this word, the Germans derived the word *bretzel* which has since mutated to the familiar word pretzel.

Another possibility for the origins of the word pretzel is that the young monk gave these breads to children as a reward for reciting their prayers. The Latin word *pretiola* means "little reward," from which pretzel could also be reasonably derived.



This simple Lenten food became very popular. Pretzels were enjoyed by all people. They became a symbol of good luck, long life and prosperity. Interestingly, they were also a common food given to the poor and hungry. Not only were pretzels easy to give to someone in

need, they were also a substantial food to satisfy the hunger and a spiritual reminder that God knows a person's needs and answers our prayers.

Another interesting story involving pretzels arises in the late 1500's, when the Ottoman Moslem Turks were besieging the city of Vienna, Austria. The Turks could not break the city's defenses, so they began to tunnel below ground. Fortunately, the monks who were baking pretzels in the basement of the monastery heard the sound of digging. They alerted the guard and saved the city.

The soft pretzels eventually evolved into hard baked pretzels. As the story goes, a young apprentice baker dozed off while tending to the oven where pretzels were baking. He woke up to find the fire dying and startled, rushed to stoke up the oven. In the end, he over-baked the pretzels. At first the master baker was upset, but soon discovered that the hard pretzels were also delicious. These hard pretzels were less perishable than the soft ones, and easy to have on hand to give to the poor and hungry.

Making pretzels as a family during Lent might be a way to integrate your faith into your daily life and create a new Lenten tradition.

Soft Pretzel Recipe



Mix 1 pkg. active dry yeast with 1 tbsp. sugar in 1 1/2 cups lukewarm water. Mixture should bubble.



Stir in 1 tsp. salt and 4 cups flour.



Place on floured board and knead in 1/2 cup more flour. Knead about 8 minutes.



Divide into pieces, roll into ropes, and shape into pretzels. As you fold the "little arms" pray the Lord's Prayer or another Lenten prayer.



Let rise until about double in size.



Preheat oven to 425 F. Place pretzels on a greased cooked sheet. Brush with a mixture of 1 egg yolk mixed with 2 tbsp. water and sprinkle with kosher salt. Bake 12 minutes or until golden brown.

ENJOY!