

Yom Hashoah An Interfaith Holocaust Remembrance Service¹



Holocaust Menorah, sculpted Aharon Bezalel²

St. Mary's Seminary & University

April 22, 2015

¹ Since 1985, St. Mary's Seminary & University has held a Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Service. This year the service is planned and led by faculty and students from the Ecumenical Institute's first ever Richman-Linehan Jewish-Christian Studies course, "Food and Faith," along with seminarians Mr. William Keown and Mr. Ian McElrath. In the fall the "Food and Faith" class read about a resilient group of women in the Terezin concentration camp who created a "cookbook of remembering." The book has been translated and published as *In Memory's Kitchen*; it exists because Mina Pächter transcribed the remembered recipes and smuggled them out of Terezin. Tonight we remember, honor and celebrate how, in the midst of atrocious evil, these women's seemingly trivial memories of domesticity and celebration became an amazing witness to the power of food and faith to cultivate and sustain courage, hope and love. Our liturgy includes musical selections played by Ms. Sally Grobani, who lived near Mina Pächter's grandson and met her daughter. Our liturgy of remembering through the recipe for Pächter Cake will conclude with sharing a Pächter Cake, baked by Ester Matyas.

² In 2001, the Center for Interreligious Understanding (New York) presented St. Mary's with a Holocaust Menorah, sculpted by the Israeli artist Aharon Bezalel. The adult figures hold six torches that represent the six million Jews who perished in the Shoah. A small child also stands among them. The original was presented to Pope John Paul II in 1999.

Prelude

Ms. Sally Grobani

Welcome

Rev. Brent Laytham

Food does many things. Food sustains us, food connects us, food identifies us. Tonight our Yom Hashoah service remembers a group of women in Terezin, a Czech concentration camp, who sustained themselves, who connected to their past and to one another, and who resolutely retained their identities, by remembering favorite foods, by recalling and recording recipes. In the evenings after a day of long and difficult work and little and deficient rations, these women refused to forget the foods that had made their lives.

Tonight we remember these women using a poem and a recipe of Mina Pächter, the woman who transcribed them. As she lay dying of starvation in 1944, Pächter asked a friend to smuggle the manuscript to her daughter, a request that took 25 years to fulfill. Six brief meditations on ingredients will be offered by members of the “Food and Faith” class, which was the Ecumenical Institute’s first Richman-Linehan Jewish-Christian Studies course. We are also grateful to Ms. Sally Grobani and friends for offering special music, and to seminarians William Keown and Ian McElrath for leadership. Our service will conclude with an invitation to identify and connect viscerally with these women of Terezin by tasting what they could only imagine—a Pächter Cake, baked by Ester Matyas.

Song

The God of Abraham Praise

Poem by Mina Pächter³

Mr. William Keown

The professor’s wife lies by the wall
Like the Cherusker she is called
Though not related to him at all
Makes noodles of no known mold
Leaves home in darkness before dawn

The professor visits every day
He used to read the Odyssey
In Greek and Latin: Heracles
And works of Mark Aurelius
Now reads just daily proclamations
And chits that list starvation rations.

Yes. In Terezin one has no courage, just worry.
And now I must tell you my own story

It isn’t a thing that is gladly confessed
But I am lazy and with food obsessed
Yet against no one by hate possessed
My elephant’s skin has all insults repelled
My indolence so far no one has dispelled
I have no more spirit, have no elan

³ Cited from *In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy From the Women of Terezin*, edited by Cara de Silva, translated by Bianca Steiner Brown (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1996)

I get along as well as I can.

But no more harsh words, Mrs. Holz lays down law
We still are one family, as you should know
For me, too, a member, the insults should cease
And so I withdraw, and will hold my peace
I fear meanwhile
I am almost getting senile
My thoughts are forever in a spin:
I may soon depart from Terezin.

Reflections on the Recipe for Pächter Cake

2/3 cup sugar

Ms. Kate Bell

Sugar makes everything it touches a little bit sweeter. Sugar is a luxury, and, in America, we often overlook this fact. While raw sugar is brown, the processed sugar that we are accustomed to is white, thus implying an element of purity. The sparkle and crystal-like structure of sugar reveals its elegance. Unlike the eggs, chocolate, coffee, or even hazelnuts, sugar generally is not consumed by itself. Rather, sugar is most often mixed with something else, something probably not as sweet.

In a situation that was by no means sweet, pure, elegant, or luxurious, women chose to allow dessert recipes to consume their imaginations and their conversation. The juxtaposition of the harsh circumstances and the delectable recipes that resulted is difficult to overlook. It is curious that those who had so little food felt the need to talk about food, especially desserts, so often. While there was very little hope that these women would ever taste the sweet dishes that would have resulted from the recipes they shared, perhaps it wasn't the dishes themselves that these women were craving.

The choice to discuss recipes was a way of psychologically resisting the horror of what was going on around them. These recipes strengthened their wills to survive as they remembered what they were committed to return to. These women were using weapons of memory to reinforce their identity, as the people around them were striving to eliminate their culture, their traditions, and their people. In reciting their recipes, it is evident that these women were craving home.

These women created a cookbook of remembering, a memoir of recipes, that makes our lives a little bit sweeter. They remind us of the pure luxury of home and the gift of joyful celebration. And so, we celebrate them.

We celebrate them.

2/3 cup butter

Rabbi Nina Cardin

Milk flows freely to the calf that nurses.

Cream floats effortlessly, buoyantly to the top.

But butter is different. It is not found but made, not given but earned.

You must fight for butter. It emerges, concedes its presence, reveals its splendor only through the alchemy of coaxing, wresting, churning and shaking it from its chambers hidden deep within the cream.

Its coming-into-being, its ability to exist, is not obvious. So until and unless you are privy to its hiddenness, its possibility, you will not even try.

Butter becomes, then, only when someone dares to believe in it, dares to look beyond what is given; dares to imagine that life is richer, denser, sweeter, more golden than world they see.

Butter comes into being from an act of faith.

The women of Terezinstadt made butter from the milk of oppression that flowed and filled their daily lives and rose daily to choke them.

Through an act of faith, through the churning of their minds, their imaginations, their words, they coaxed into being - out of the horrors around them - visions of home, goodness, ordinariness, blessings, abundance, defiance. They dwelt upon their yesterdays to dream of their tomorrows and forget and vanquish the horror of their todays.

They spoke of butter in the face of death.

For this, for the greatness of their human spirit, we celebrate them.

We celebrate them.

2/3 cup hazelnuts

Ms. Joanne Tetrault

The dream cookbook ... the cookbook of remembering was the way Mina Pachter and the other women of the Terezin concentration camp found to leave their legacy in the face of the unimaginable. At night, wrote 12-year-old Eva Schulzova, "...the women have a lot to talk about. They remember their homes and dinners they made."

It wasn't only the women. Elsewhere in this same camp, male prisoners spoke about food, as a means of survival. In the classic memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl wrote, "One fellow would ask another working next to him in the ditch what his favorite dishes were. Then they would exchange recipes and plan the menu for the day when they would have a reunion..." It was if their words and imaginings might replace the real, physical sustenance until another day.

Memories and dreams about food and the comfort and joy it brought were like a kernel of hope amid the most horrid of realities. Those who were able to imagine their future and keep their past alive through memory were more apt to survive on this, a daily helping hope – however meager – feeding on the rich marrow of remembrances deep within them, in a place no one could enter and desecrate.

Part of Mina Pachter's legacy is a cake, made more rich and delicious by hazelnuts. The hazelnuts add texture and crunch – a pleasing surprise for the mouth in contrast to the smooth blending together of the other ingredients. Hazelnuts add a bit of bite – a surprising little show of strength and outer toughness that protects the inner nectar, which holds all of the promise and the gift for the effort of shelling the nut.

To Mina and her companions, we offer our thanks for their outer strength and determination that gave shelter to their tenderness and willingness to risk their very lives to bring sustenance, hope, and joy to future generations. We celebrate them.

We celebrate them.

Music

Sally Grobani and vocalists

1/2 cup chocolate

Ms. Pat Rudolph

Baking chocolate, as it melts, has a wonderful, warm, rich aroma but when you are tempted to take a taste, you find it very bitter. Only in combination with the sugar, butter, eggs and nuts do you get the deliciously sweet Pachter Cake. In a bitter setting, women joined together to remember a better past and imagine a sweeter future. Others created poetry or music but these women created home. In the face of deprivation and death, they declared their belief in life, love and family by remembering the special meals and special dishes that they had shared with their families and friends.

In their imaginations, they kept alive a vibrant and nourishing way of life. Not only did they keep their memories but they shared them. They sustained each other by comparing, critiquing and even arguing over the recipes. They exerted their independence and their worth in the face of a system that denied them everything.

We remember and honor all of the victims of the holocaust but especially the women who used their memories and their imaginations as weapons against obliteration. In the bitterness of loss, they banded together to create a heritage of recipes, yes, but more importantly a legacy of courage and resistance to the dehumanizing forces waging war on them. We remember them.

We remember them.

3 tbsp coffee

Rev. Naomi Hartman

When so much has been taken away, the human spirit finds a way to fight, to persevere, and even to conquer. As mouths watered for the taste of familiar recipes, and hearts yearned for the connection to home, minds created opportunities to celebrate and fortify the spirit. Wartime rationing had already stripped the cupboards bare of so many essential ingredients to preparing cultural and familial favorite recipes, but substitutions were made, and recipes prevailed. In the overwhelming face of anger, hatred, fear and death women gathered and created nurturing their imaginations by cooking with their thoughts, their fantasies, their memories.

Through the bitter stench of gas chambers and prison camps a faint aroma of hope swells. A mystery ingredient that you cannot always name at first taste, it rushes over you to combine in a symphony of flavors, building on the sweetness, richness, and bitterness brought to the Pachter cake. Coffee with its bold scent and flavor, but its ability to hide in plain sight, offers both a unique depth to taste and a hidden treasure to delight.

Recipes created in the depths of despair as release, hope, and promise served the women of Terezin, and many other communities, as an opportunity to be bold in retaining their culture. Perhaps under the guise of passing the time and pains of hunger, they created a space for fears and dreams to turn into promises of future celebrations and an opportunity to “reinforce their identity”. For Mina Pachter and her

companions who sought imagination in substitution for sorrow, creation in place of devastation, and boldness in the face of destruction, we give thanks. We remember them.

We remember them.

2 eggs (separated)

Rev. Brent Laytham

We eat, indeed we live, on the fertility of other creatures. From rice to raspberries, our lives are nourished by separating creation's fertility from the reproductive cycle so we can consume it. So let this first egg separated represent fertility. The delightful spectrum of cooked eggs—from omelettes to soufflés, from breakfast to dessert—ought to school us in gratitude to a generous God who has given us a fecund creation. But we can grow too accustomed, too comfortable, with disappropriating the fertility of other creatures. Let this first separated egg warn us that no amount of thanking God or consecrating food could ever justify the desecration of stealing the fertility, taking the lives, of fellow human beings. Let that egg, separated, remind us that the Holocaust was an organized attempt to separate, disappropriate, and destroy the fertility, indeed the very life, of a people.

Now let the second egg be fragility. Eggs symbolize the vulnerability that constitutes our creaturely existence. Not just the eggshells, so easily cracked and broken, but the whole. Try separating a yolk from its white, and you may quickly find how tender, how easily torn, is that golden orb at the center. Where care and skill protect its vulnerabilities, the intact egg is remarkably resilient. But where skill is turned toward separation or destruction, the fragile egg is defenseless. In one sense, similarly fragile, similarly defenseless, were the bodies and the lives of these women in Terezin. Yet in another sense, as their minds brought memory's goodness into speech, as their spirits refused to be separated from the remembered conviviality of cooking and sharing food, their remarkable resilience is seen and heard. In the simple words "two eggs (separated)," their lives echo again, and we remember them.

We remember them.

Silence

Psalms 130 said or sung

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

**Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!**

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

**But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.**

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

**my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.**

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

**and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.**

Conclusion and Grace

Rabbi Nina Cardin

Sharing Mina Pächter's cake

Postlude

Ms. Sally Grobani