

Salt Dough Recipe for Crown of Thorns and other crafts

This simple recipe can be used for Christmas ornaments as well as the Lenten project mentioned by Stacy Mitch in her article "Hearts at Home: Living the Liturgy as Preparation for Our Heavenly Home" in the November/December '06 issue of Lay Witness.

On Ash Wednesday, follow the instructions below to make a salt dough crown of thorns with your children, anticipating Lenten sacrifices your family hopes to make. Place the crown in a prominent place in your home; it makes an excellent centerpiece for your dining room table, and placing it upon a royal purple cloth has a striking effect.

For each Lenten sacrifice a family member makes, he or she pulls a toothpick out of the crown. This activity makes a great visual reminder of Christ's suffering: Parents can explain to their children that sin brings additional pain to Jesus' suffering and good works can comfort Him and show our love for Him.

The goal should be to remove all "thorns" from the crown by Easter. Once all the "thorns" have been removed, you can paint the crown gold or otherwise decorate it with colorful craft jewels, beads, or flowers where the "thorns" once were as a sign of the triumph of our risen King. This makes a beautiful Easter Sunday centerpiece with a great story to share with your guests.



Materials:

4 c. flour
1 c. salt
Water
Toothpicks

Directions:

Mix flour and salt. Mix enough water to make a stiff clay. (A little warmth helps dissolve the salt.) Knead until smooth to remove any air bubbles. Roll three long ropes and loosely braid them. Form braid into a circle and stick toothpicks loosely throughout the entire crown (If they are embedded too deeply they cannot be pulled out intact.) Bake at 350° F for an hour or until it is dry and light brown.



Did you know that...

The pretzel has its origins as an official food of Lent?

Much of the information available is based on tradition handed down through the ages. The

Vatican library actually has a manuscript illustrating one of the earliest pictures/descriptions of the pretzel (Manuscript Code no. 3867)!

In the early Church, Lenten abstinence and fasting laws were more strict than what we practice today. Many people abstained from all forms of meat, while others made exceptions for food like fish. Pope St. Gregory (d. 604), 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." Second, 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. So a need arose for a very simple food which would fulfill the abstinence and fasting laws.

According to pretzel maker Snyder's of Hanover, a young monk in the early 600s 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. (To be fair, some traditions date the story to even the 300s.)

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 when they could recite their prayers. The Latin word *pretiola* means "little reward," from which *pretzel* could also be reasonably derived.

Apparently, 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, but also they were both a substantial food to satisfy the hunger and a spiritual reminder of God knowing a person's needs and answering our prayers.

Another interesting story involving pretzels arises in the late 1500s, 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. The monks in the basement of the monastery were baking pretzels and heard the sound of digging. They alerted the guard and saved the city.

The soft pretzels eventually evolved into hard baked pretzels. Another story is that a young apprentice baker dozed off while tending to the oven where the pretzels were baking. The oven fire began to die out, he awoke, and then stoked 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, and thereby easy to have available to give to the poor and hungry. Here we find another "fun" tradition of our faith, just like Easter eggs or hot cross buns. Actually, a good Lenten family activity would be to make pretzels, explaining to the children their significance. The real challenge for this author is to find some justification for adding beer to the Lenten pretzel tradition.

So have a pretzel and enjoy!