



Festa Dei Sette Pesci



Festa Dei Sette Pesci, or Feast of the Seven

Fishes is traditionally served by Italians on Christmas Eve. It is the commemoration of **Vigilia di Natale**, the Vigil, or the wait for the midnight birth of the baby Jesus. Fish and seafood is served based upon the Roman Catholic tradition of abstinence from meat on Fridays and holy holidays. The number seven is thought to also stem from biblical reference to sum of the divinity (three) plus the four corners of the earth (north, east south and west) or Jesus's presence on earth, although there are other interpretations as to where the number seven came from. Begun in ancient times as a fast, in true Italian style, it has become a feast. Many regions of Italy also celebrate with a midnight bonfire.



The most common fish served on Christmas Eve is **baccala**, or dry salted cod, which dates back to Roman times and a way to preserve fish without refrigeration. It is often prepared in a baccala salad. Fish and seafood other than baccala is common including **anguilla (eel)**, **scungilli (conch)**, **calamari (squid)**, **acciughe (anchovies)**, **sardine(sardines)**, **piovra (octopus)**, **vongole (clams)**, **ostriche (oysters)**, **gamberetti (shrimp)**, **gamberi (prawns)** and **sperlano (smelt)**. Eels were especially important since some believe that eating them on Christmas Eve ensures a year of happiness. The meal is supplemented with pasta, oftentimes **tagliatelle nero di sepia**, or black squid ink pasta, **lupini** beans and a glass of homemade vino. Of course fish and seafood is not the only thing eaten at the feast. Antipasti of **olives**, **caponata**, **roasted peppers** and **artichokes** are often served first.



And of course a meal isn't complete without the traditional Italian deserts including, **biscotti**, **cannellini ricci**, **cuccidate**, **fati**, **frittole**, **cannoli**, **macaroons**, **marzipan**, **panettone**, **panforte**, **pignolatte**, **pizelle** and **torrone**, and from my mother's recipe book, **chumbelli**, **biscuit tortoni**, **rosettes** and **strufoli**, all topped off with **espresso** with **sambuca**.

But the food isn't the main event of the holidays, that's only because we Italians like to eat good food. The best part of the traditional holidays is that the cooking was done in the presence of la famiglia, with two generations making pasta and ravioli for the next day, discussing politics, enjoying each other's company but most importantly, the entire family is together.



Buon Natale from la famiglia at **DOMA** Importing Co.



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