

Faithful flock to pizza shops to avoid meat on a Lenten Friday

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Maroni's Pizza House co-owner Carmen Pellegrino does not count how many pizzas his business bakes on Friday during Lent.

Nor does he count how many people come in and out of his St. Ann's Street shop.

That would slow him down.

"It's just incredibly busy," Mr. Pellegrino said. "Keep moving; that's it."

Friday is usually a busy day anyway, but since many of the area's practicing Catholics do not eat meat on Fridays and turn to pizza as an easy, meat-free alternative, they are even more intense.

From a historical perspective, Catholics abstain from meat during Lent for multiple symbolic reasons, University of Scranton theology professor Patrick Clark, Ph.D. said.

It is an act of penance, a display that you are giving something up, particularly something that is associated with things that deal with flesh. There is also symbolism in not shedding blood the same day that Christ did.

"Catholics love all kinds of food, but it's more of how your dietary habits bring things to mind," Dr. Clark said.

Scranton resident Jim James, 60, said he believes pizza is an important part of going through Lent.

"It gives you a sense of doing your part for your religion," Mr. James said while picking up pizza from Maroni's on a Friday night.

Pete Montana, owner of Basilico's Pizzeria Restaurant, 608 Commerce Blvd., Dickson City, said that hundreds of people come throughout the day for a Lent-friendly bite to eat, nearly double what he sees on a normal Friday.

To accommodate the Lenten crowd, his business offers specialty pizzas, including shrimp, vegetables and clams, he said.

Scranton resident Jerry Moras, 52, said the wait for a pie of pizza from Maroni's is

around a half an hour or more on Fridays, but the wait is as worth it today as it was when he first started eating their pizza 30 years ago.

"Best pizza in town," Mr. Moras said. "I always get pizza for Lent."

Taylor resident Melinda Shaughnessy said her family has been eating pizza for Lent for years. The reason is simple: it is a food the whole family can agree on.

"And my husband gets an easy dinner," Mrs. Shaughnessy said with a laugh.

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