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# The Roman Jubilee

*A sacred time of renewal, reflection and grace in the Catholic Church, a Roman chef shares recipes for this special, yearlong celebration.*

BY LAUREN BIRMINGHAM  
PISCITELLI



Trinità dei Monti sits above the Spanish Steps in Rome. Photo by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

Every day is a celebration when visiting the Eternal City of Roma. From the iconic landmarks of Piazza Navona and the Trevi Fountain to the smallest winding street in Trastevere brushed with golden rays of Roman light, the city dazzles 12 months a year.

But this year, the city seems even more special as it celebrates Jubilee 2025, a sacred time of renewal, reflection and grace in the Catholic Church. Jubilees are celebrated every 25 years in Rome.

I am always eager to learn about Italian history and culture, so today I am speaking with Maria Elena, a resident of Rome and the Rome guide for my business, Cooking Vacations. We met at the landmark Antico Caffè Greco, near the Spanish Steps, which has been serving guests since 1760.

Maria Elena leads Cooking Vacations' historical landmark tours to the Vatican, Colosseum with gelato tastings, and Testaccio market. She is an expert on all things Roman and knows the most delicious restaurants in the Eternal City. We order espressos and begin talking.

"The Jubilee is a time for the Catholic Church to get together, to make a pilgrimage to Rome, and pray with the Pope. The Jubilee is also called a Holy Year, not only because it begins and ends with liturgical holy acts, but because its purpose is to encourage holiness of life, strengthen faith, and encourage acts of charity and fraternal love," she says.

"The first Jubilee was proclaimed by Pope Boniface IV in the year 1300. Fifty years later, there was a second Jubilee, then until 1475 it was organized every 50 years. Since then, it occurs every 25 years, offering each generation the chance to celebrate. There is a calendar of activities held in the Vatican at the Basilica of Saint Peter's," she says.

During the Jubilee, pilgrims from all over the world visit Rome and walk through the Holy Doors of the four major basilicas: Saint Peter's, Saint John Lateran, Saint Mary Major, and Saint Paul. There is a rite of reconciliation, gaining a plenary indulgence to forgive sins. The four major basilicas are part of the seven major churches of Rome, which are all key pilgrimage stops. But Maria Elena says it's not correct to call the event the Rome Jubilee. "The official name is the Jubilee or the Jubilee of the Catholic Church," she says. "The organizers never stop to spiritually prepare for the next Jubilee, but in terms of architecture or interior renovation, they start to prepare two years in advance. After all, 35 million pilgrims are expected to come to Rome. However, my favorite activity is prayer with the Pope."

After a long conversation, we say goodbye and I make my way to Chef Barbara's. She is Cooking Vacations' beloved chef who welcomes guests to her home and teaches them how to cook. Today, we will prepare Pasta alla Papalina. Although there are no specific foods related to the Jubilee, she celebrates

the Jubilee with this pasta.

Chef Barbara is a true Roman who knows how to make delicious everything. Her signature recipes are carciofi alla Romana, Roman artichokes sautéed in white wine, carbonara, spaghetti made with an egg, guanciale—cured pork from the cheek of the pig—and Pecorino and Romano cheese sauce, and cacio e pepe, bucatini or tonnarelli pasta served in a pepper and cheese.

I arrive at her palazzo and make my way to the penthouse. She welcomes me in, then leads me to the rooftop terrace which boasts a 360-degree panoramic view over Rome. It feels like I've walked onto the set of Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. The table is set with Gaeta black olives, Italian potato chips and two Aperol Spritz. Flower boxes brimming with jasmine blow in the breeze and Saint Peter's dome dominates in the distance.

We enjoy our aperitivo and tie on aprons. Chef Barbara talks about the ingredients we will be using. "Guanciale and pecorino are the two must-have ingredients in a Roman kitchen. Guanciale is an Italian cured meat made from pork cheek. It has a rich, fatty texture and a distinct, flavorful taste, often used in traditional Roman recipes like pasta alla carbonara, pasta all'amatriciana, and pasta alla gricia. Pecorino is an Italian cheese made from sheep's milk. It is known for its sharp flavor, which can range from mild to very strong depending on how long it's aged. Pecorino is commonly used



in Roman pasta recipes, salads, or eaten on its own. Today, we will make Pasta alla Papalina, the Pope's Pasta. It's on my Jubilee menu."

Pasta alla Papalina is a royal Roman pasta with very aristocratic origins first made for Pope Pius XII, born Eugenio Pacelli. He had requested a lighter and more refined version of spaghetti alla carbonara, which had become very popular in post-war Rome. Therefore, he asked the Vatican chef to modify the creamy carbonara recipe, and the result was Pasta alla Papalina. He wanted a healthy primo. The chef replaced guanciale, pork, with ham, and Pecorino Romano with Parmigiano Reggiano, and sautéed onion with butter instead of using garlic. The raw eggs remained, the heavy cream was removed, and peas were added. The final secret ingredient was fettucine pasta. Everyone loved it, and Pope Pius XII made history with Pasta alla Papalina.

Barbara tells me she started cooking at eight years old with her mom and grandmother; her love has turned into a full-time career. Before each cooking class, she leads guests to the local outdoor farmer's market and shows everyone what and how to buy. She cooks in the rhythm of the seasons using strawberries in spring, melon

and peaches in summer, and citrus fruits in fall and winter. She loves Roman artichokes and chicory in spring, peppers and tomatoes in summer, and broccoli and broccoli di rapa in fall and winter. Her favorite recipe is pasta all'amatriciana, because "it was the first recipe she learned from her grandmother."

Together we slice, dice and sauté. "After my family's visit to the Vatican passing through the Holy Door, we return home and cook. Our menu includes Pasta alla Papalina, pollo con peperoni, chicken with peppers—truly a Roman tradition—and sautéed cabbage with white wine. After enjoying so much food, dessert must be light. I prepare La Crema di Ricotta, whipped ricotta garnished with Nutella, orange zest and cocoa powder served over lady fingers that have been soaked in milk. It's a lunch fit for a Pope."

Barbara is passionate in the kitchen, but also emphasizes, "The Jubilee is a time for spiritual renewal, reflection and growth focusing on themes of mercy, hope, and solidarity with others. The celebration carries a deep sense of reverence. It's a time to reflect on the journey, to be happy for what has been accomplished, and to give thanks for those who have contributed to that path. I

think what makes a Jubilee so special is its ability to bring people together."

Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli is founder and owner of Cooking Vacations Italy which specializes in culinary tours, hands-on cooking classes and cultural adventures in Italy. [www.cooking-vacations.com](http://www.cooking-vacations.com); (617) 247-4112.

## CACIO E PEPE

These simple words, cacio e pepe, bring music to every Italian's ear. This humble recipe, made with black pepper, Pecorino Romano cheese, and pasta, was once a farmers' and shepherds' recipe from the Roman countryside. Today the pepper and cheese sauce topped on tonnarelli pasta is now made throughout Rome with love. The secret ingredient is fresh black peppercorns. A truly Romano recipe that is easy to make and delicious when high-quality ingredients are used.

- 13 ounces pasta, tonnarelli or spaghetti**
- 3 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 teaspoon olive oil**
- 8½ ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, grated, plus extra for garnish**
- Sea salt, to taste**

Bring salted water to a boil in a large pasta pot. Next, add the pasta to the boiling water and cook until al dente. A few minutes before the pasta is cooked, grind the fresh black pepper in a sauté pan and pour a small amount of the pasta water into the pan with the olive oil. Let it simmer for a couple of minutes. Drain the pasta and add it to the sauté pan to let it absorb the flavor. Turn the heat a little lower, and add the cheese. Mix to combine. Add a little pasta water and continue to mix in the pan. Plate the pasta, then garnish with freshly ground black pepper and a dusting of Pecorino cheese. Salt to taste, if desired. Serve immediately.

Makes 8 servings.

