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Review: Pupusería Divino Corazón


DINING OUT

Pupusería Divino Corazón

This year we've heard a lot of taco talk. Serious eaters have tracked down trucks, developed a taste for tongue and declared a passion for tacos *al pastor*. There's been Brazilian buzz. On both banks, churascarias—Brazilian-style steakhouses—popped up at almost the same moment.

A first time visitor to Pupusería Divino Corazón might mistake this West Bank destination for a new addition. On the sign outside, a slick cartoon character welcomes customers with a steaming pupusa in one hand. Inside, the Virgin Mary watches over the well-decorated dining room from her freshly painted niche. But the menu trumpets "18 years of feeding you like *familia*" and betrays the age of this restaurant, which was closed for too long after Katrina.

Central-American food is subtle. The spices are mild, the flavors subdued. Any heat is a whisper instead of a shout. But when the ingredients are fresh, when everything arrives hot from the griddle and fresh from the fryer, it can be deeply satisfying. And Divino Corazón does it as well or better than anyone else in town.

The steaming hot pupusas—corn-meal tortillas a little thicker than flapjacks and stuffed with cheese and meat—have a map of griddle marks across the top. A mound of *curtido*, thread-thin slaw with a wallop of vinegar, is on the side to add a sharp note to the creamy pupusas. The ceviche is milder than others found around New Orleans, but the briny broth is irresistible. The yuca, like a creamy potato with a faint fibrous backbone, is served in a black pot crowned with *curtido*, crisp curls of fried pork skin and a splash of red salsa. Wash it all down with a big glass of a *bebida natural*. My favorite is *chan*, a sweet and sour red lemonade with chia seeds for a dash of bitterness.

In the excitement over new Latin American restaurants, let's not forget that one of the best is a veteran that's now back in business. 2300 Belle Chasse Hwy., Gretna, 504-368-5724, Mon-Sat 11am-8pm.

—Todd A. Price