

CULTURAL DINNER

I had dinner with a couple whose cultural background is Kisii. The wife's name is Florence Nyambeki and her husband Jones Omaiya. Their children, eighteen year old daughter Sarah and four year old Mary were present. Their only son Jaiden was away in boarding school. As stated earlier the couple's tribe is Kisii. Their cultural home is Kisii County which is in the western part of the country. Kisii County has a population of 1.267 people according to 2019 census.

I visited the couple on Friday 13th March 2020 and we had a wonderful meal. The menu consisted of Ugali which is the traditional meal for Kisii people, Sour Milk, and the traditional vegetable sageti (Spider Flower). After the meal, African mixed tea was served together with fruits which comprised of ripe bananas and pawpaw.

After dinner, the couple agreed I interview them on the types of food common with Kisii people, and the culture of serving food to different categories of people.

Types of food common among Kisii people – Cultural foods

Kisii's main traditional food is Ugali, which is made from either of the following: maize, Cassava, Millet, or sorghum flour. Sometimes a mixture of two or three mentioned flours would be used to make the Ugali. This is served with traditional vegetable such as Sageti (Spider Flower), Managu, derema or Kahurura (Pumpkin leaves). All these vegetables are very rich in iron, beta-carotene, calcium, fiber, magnesium and other medicinal benefits. I was informed that, these traditional vegetables must be part of the menu of an expectant and nursing mother because of their rich nutritional values.

Other foods common in Kisii tribe are boiled bananas, cassava, sweet potatoes and yams. Githeri (a mixture of boiled maize and beans) is also common in Kisii, but mostly taken as a snack. Fermented milk always feature in the menu and it goes well with Ugali. Porridge made from millet flour is served for breakfast accompanied by either githeri, sweet potatoes, cassava or boiled bananas.

Cultural way of serving food

In a family set up, it is the duty of the wife to serve her husband first and make sure he has enough food. The wife then serves the children and she would serve herself last. Note that, in the rural areas, there is no self service. Food is dished out by the lady of the house and she hands it over to each member of the family.

Important Visitors

Important visitors are treated in a special way. Valued guest may include in laws, best friends of the family and dignitaries. When these category of people visit, apart from the cultural food ugali, meat will be served, hence a cow or a goat must be slaughtered. The meat is served in honour to the visitors signifying that they are regarded in high esteem. The meat is, however, shared by everybody in the homestead. The choice of the animal depends on how many visitors are involved. Note that the meal must include fermented milk and porridge made of millet flour.

Young people visiting a chicken will be slaughtered for them or beef or mutton will be bought from a local butchery and the meat prepared for them.

Cultural way of serving different parts of animal meat (goat/sheep and chicken

Just like many tribes in Kenya, Kisii's there are certain parts of an animal that must be eaten by designated people. If a goat is slaughtered, the head of the goat is reserved for the husband together with the legs and intestines. All the rest of the goat is shared by everybody in the family plus any visitors. If a chicken is slaughtered, the backbone, gizzard and the head are reserved for the husband. The chicken liver can only be eaten by either the wife or the children. The rest of the chicken may be shared by anyone in the family.

Conclusion

The family I visited are Christians who worship with the 7th Day Adventist Church. The family keep to the cultural diet which is very rich in nutrition. They have however discarded those tradition beliefs and customs that go against the Christian values.