Italian Meatballs II

Yield: 16 meatballs

1 pound ground beef (at least 16% fat)
1 pound ground pork
2/3 cup milk (whole or 2%)
3 slices (3 ounces) white bread, crusts removed
1/4 cup ricotta cheese
1/4 cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese
2 eggs
1 tablespoon Kosher salt
1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
2 teaspoons black pepper
1 teaspoon dried oregano or marjoram
2 to 3 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup flour (for dusting)
1/3 cup olive oil
2 1/2 cups (24 ounces) tomato sauce (see recipe below)

TOMATO SAUCE
2 tablespoons olive oil
3/4 cup onions, finely chopped
3/4 cup carrots, finely chopped
3/4 cup celery, finely chopped
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
1 can (28 ounce) crushed or whole tomatoes including the juice
1/2 teaspoon dried basil or 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1 teaspoon tomato paste
salt (to taste)
pepper (to taste)

Start with the tomato sauce which will simmer while you prepare the meatballs. In a large saucepan on medium heat, heat the olive oil. Add the onions, carrots, celery and parsley. Stir to coat with the oil. Reduce the heat to low. Cover the pan. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft and cooked through. Remove the cover. Add the garlic. Increase the heat to medium-high. Cook the garlic for one-half minute. Add the tomatoes (if you are using whole canned, break up with your fingers as you add them to the pan). Add the tomato paste and basil. Season with salt and pepper.

Bring to a slow simmer. Reduce the heat to low. Cook, uncovered until thickened, while you prepare the meatballs, 15 to 30 minutes. Puree' the sauce in a blender (or push through a food mill) for a smooth consistency. Adjust the seasonings.

Prepare the meatballs: In a small pot, heat the milk until steamy. Turn off the heat. Tear the bread into little pieces and soak it in the milk until it partially dissolves. Mash it until you get something that resembles a paste. Turn it out onto a plate to cool.

In a large bowl, combine the beef, pork, ricotta, Parmesan, eggs, salt, parsley, oregano, black pepper, garlic and the bread-milk mixture. Mix well with your hands until it barely combines. Do not overwork the mixture or it will become tough. It is allright to have some discernible bits of bread or meat in the mix (better that than overworked meatballs).

Wet your hands and form the meatballs. A traditional size for this sort of meatball is two to three inches across, but you can make them any size desired. After you roll the meatball in your hands, roll it in the flour to give it a good coating. Set each meatball on a baking sheet as you work. (You might need to rinse your hands a few times as you make the meatballs.)

When all the meatballs are formed, heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Brown the meatballs on at least two sides. Don't worry about the center getting cooked through, as you will finish the meatballs in the sauce.

Once all the meatballs are browned, arrange them in the sauce, turning each one over in the

sauce to coat. Cover the pot and simmer gently for 15 to 20 minutes.

Serve with the sauce and pasta or crusty bread. Sprinkle with a little chopped parsley for garnish, if desired.