

But there's more than legality involved. People say they can taste a difference between genuine Roquefort and other blue cheeses. And matters of taste are not limited to French foodstuffs. There's a difference between a good California wine and a good New York wine, between maple syrup from Ohio and maple syrup from Vermont, between potatoes from Idaho and potatoes from Maine. Same for "Vidalia Onions" and "California Raisins." All of them can be good products, but many people say they can detect a difference, and thus, protecting the unique characteristics of foods from a specific area is worth the extra effort.

Protected God Indication. If the location can influence the taste of food, might location ever have a bearing on the depth of our spiritual life? Our Scripture reading tells us immediately after his baptism by John in the Jordan River, Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he was both tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels. In fact, three of the four gospels tell of Jesus being in the wilderness for 40 days. Matthew and Luke giving more details, but Mark simply tells us that it happened and gives us a sense of its significance to Jesus' life and work.

The focus of three gospels on Jesus' time in the wilderness suggests that that *location* was a crucible that shaped his subsequent ministry and confirmed for him what needed to be protected in his life. This being the first Sunday in Lent, I would offer that spiritually speaking, there are things of the Spirit that we might gain from some form of retreat, some change of location, if only for a few hours, where we can have some PGI time, as it were. Protected God Indication.

You may have gotten some sense of this if you've ever gone on a church mission trip that took you into an unfamiliar setting and culture. Many people return from such experiences with a new viewpoint and a heightened spirituality. The same thing can happen during a church retreat or even a vacation that takes you away from your routine. And it need not be an extended jaunt. A trip to the library or the lake or a park can have a positive effect, especially if we allow it to be somewhere we can pray, reflect, plan, get energized, or catch a new vision. It was no accident that following Jesus' retreat to the wilderness, he began a ministry that changed the world!

Location, location, location! One thing that we can notice as we read in the gospels about Jesus' ministry is that while he never took another 40-day retreat, he frequently withdrew from the crowds and often even from the disciples to pray. He usually sought

out a deserted place to do his praying, perhaps as a link to his wilderness experience. In the gospels, there are several mentions of his praying in deserted places.

+ Matthew and John both tell us that after teaching a crowd all day and then performing the miracle of feeding the 5,000, he dismissed the crowds and "went up the mountain by himself to pray" (Matthew 14:23; cf. John 6:15).

+ Mark reports that Jesus had spent a day preaching and healing people. The next day, "while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (1:35).

+ Luke tells us that in preparation for choosing the 12 disciple, "[Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

+ Luke also tells about a time when he healed a man of his leprosy, and word of his ability spread like wildfire and crowds came to be healed. In the face of such a crush Jesus withdrew to a deserted place to pray (Luke 5:16).

Jesus' habit of retreating to deserted places to pray teaches us a few things. For one thing, it suggests that *we need to be intentional about finding a time and place to pray and listen*. It helps to be organized and systematic about prayer so that it doesn't get forgotten or neglected.

Jesus' practice also helps us think about *the deserted places in our lives*. For most of us, deserted places do not refer so much to physical locations as to the parts of our lives to which we forget to invite God. A woman who had an hour-long commute by car to her job said that those two hours she spent in the car each day seemed like wasted time. Then one day, while fretting about how haphazard she'd been about allotting time to pray, it occurred to her that she had plenty of time in the car, and she began using it. Obviously, she didn't shut her eyes or try to read the Bible, but she did turn off the radio and tried to lay out before God the things that were on her heart. She didn't spend all her time in the car that way, but she said she found an enrichment of her spiritual life beginning to take place.

Deserted places can also refer *to places where we lack what others have*. Not much is known about William Walford who wrote the words to "Sweet Hour of Prayer" in 1842. We do know that he was a minister who lived in England and was totally blind. Maybe this hymn grew out of his experience with living in a world where the ability to see had deserted him.

Further, deserted places can refer to times *during which we suddenly feel alone because of temptations or rage or discouragement or doubt or some other inward experience*. Those are times to pray. They are the deserted places of our lives and filling them with prayer - even if only a brief call to God - can change the complexion of the experience in a way that brings us more in line with God's will.

There's a letter written a few years back by the late Jacques Maritain, who was a Catholic philosopher, to a 17-year-old girl. We don't know who she was, but apparently, she'd been raised in the church but then found herself, metaphorically at least, in a deserted place where, because of something that happened, she felt she had lost God. She was angry about it and had written to Maritain.

In writing back, Maritain told her that things would not always look to her as they did at that moment. He appealed for her to use every ounce of her intelligence and suggested some things to read. Then he added: "I am not telling you to wait, I am telling you rather to take advantage of the fact that you are completely broken and beaten to the ground in order to set yourself to a real search for truth - putting your childhood behind you...I am not telling you to wait - *I am telling you to pray* as best you can, blaspheming perhaps, groping and stammering. Tell [God], 'If you exist, make yourself known to me.'"

Our souls and our spiritual health are things worth protecting. Often, our spirit is revived and strengthened by finding a culture or location where it can best grow and develop. At any time when the forces of existence weigh upon us so that we feel we are in a deserted place, we can and should pray. Even if the prayer is simply one word: "Help!" The example of Jesus shows us prayer can turn the deserted places into PGI time. Then, when we get to those bad spots, we are not simply getting reacquainted with God, but turning to the One who has been making the divine known to us all along.

Prayer from Psalm 86 :1-4 = Hear me, LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you. Amen.

Sources:

- "EU protected food names: how to register food or drink products." Gov.uk. Retrieved July 23, 2017.
- "Geographical indications and traditional specialties in the European Union." Wikipedia.org. 7-23-2017.
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PGI Time

Sunday, February 18, 2018
Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Mark 1:9-15

What do you call a cheese factory in the Middle East?	Cheeses of Nazareth
What kind of cheese surrounds a medieval castle?	Moatzarella
What do you call cheese that does not belong to you?	Nacho Cheese
In what hotel do mice stay?	The Stilton
Which cheese is made backwards?	Edam
Did you hear about the cheese that filed to win a gold medal at the Olympics?	It fell at the final curdle.

Working cheese puns into the sermon was a *bries*, and pretty *gouda* way to start things off; because this sermon is going to be cheesy, at least in the beginning: Roquefort cheesy, to be specific. You probably know that Roquefort cheese is a sheep-milk blue cheese from the south of France. What you may not know is that not all blue cheeses may be called Roquefort cheese. To qualify for that name, the cheese must be made entirely from the milk of the Lacaune breed of sheep and matured in the natural caves near the town of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon in the Aveyron region of France, where the fungus *penicillium roqueforti* grows and hleps to mature this cheese.

And who says so? The European Union, does. The EU has designation schemes that enable products to be placed on its protected food-name register. Goods like cheese, wine, chocolate, honey are eligible for this register if they meet certain standards. One such designation is the Protected Geographical Indication scheme, or PGI. To get a product protected under PGI, it must be produced, processed and prepared in a specific geographical area and it must be the result of characteristics or qualities unique to that geographical area. Roquefort cheese is PGI-designated because it meets those requirements, and thus no blue cheese produced outside of the Aveyron region of France can legally be labeled Roquefort.