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Good Things

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

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“Good Things”

One of my favorite Scripture verses offers a very sound motive and a quite reasonable criterion for choosing when to speak and when to remain silent: “Say only the good things people need to hear, things that will really help them.” (Ephesians 4:29)

Two reflective questions for us before we speak are: “What do people need to hear from us?” and “What can we say that will really help them?” These questions are quite different from the more familiar: “What do we feel like saying?” And, brief as the time and effort required for reflecting on the purpose and benefits of speaking or not speaking, we know from much experience that we can easily produce words and expressions that no one needs and that are less than helpful to our hearers.

What an excellent motive to employ when saying something to a child, or for speaking up at a meeting, or for writing a note: “whatever will really help them.” To consider the possible effects of what we say or choose not to say and being concerned about how our words might be of assistance or a hindrance to others in their life journeys is definitely an opportunity for us to act in agreement with God. We can readily imagine that Jesus chose his words carefully, moved by his love for us.

Believing that God wants what is best for everyone, we can depend upon God to give us inspirations either to find the right words or to avoid communicating, whichever will benefit those we have in mind. When our concern is the welfare of others, we will not intend hurt or harm. Painful misunderstandings can arise, but there is no real injury when our honest desire is to be of help.

Even as children, we probably were taught: “If you have nothing good to say about a person, say nothing at all.” Respect for others is not age-specific. We certainly do not want to approve of negative behavior in others, and we have a responsibility to defend the common good. Most of us have had to speak a hard truth to a misbehaving child or to a peer whose actions or words were out of place. But there is no one whom God does not love, and God asks us to reflect this truth in all our modes of communication with everyone from family members to complete strangers.

Anger is a powerful emotion, providing us with instant energy. If we speak or write from anger primarily as a means of release, we will probably add to the kind of pain and injustice that might have elicited

our feelings of anger in the first place. The same God who created us in love is as capable of guiding us in our use of anger-energy as with our most calm and collected moments. Rather than tear down with anger, we might find that, with the near-instantaneous grace of choosing rather than reacting, we are enabled to communicate a truth that someone needs to hear, that can really help him or her. We know that in some circumstances, only forceful words will convey the appropriate level of authority.

The passage from Ephesians invites us to pay attention to the end results of what we communicate to others, whether face to face, text-messaging, on the phone, speaking in a group setting or making use of the media. God's good inspirations move us to want "good things" for all who receive our words.