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The power of wurds

So, my wife and I are in a fast-food drive-through. I take the bag of food from the cashier, and as I begin to drive off I say to the cashier, "Thank!"

What the…? Where did the "you" go?

I wanted to back up and say, "You! Thank YOU!" After which I would have insisted that *Yes, I'm normal, heh, heh, despite evidence to the contrary!* Perhaps I should begin carrying a doctor's note with me as proof.

Meanwhile, Charlene couldn't stop laughing.

Which is why I feel it necessary to share one of *her* verbal foibles. I need to preface this by saying that Charlene is very close to her brothers. They never end a phone conversation without telling each other "I love you."

So, we're in a department story checking out. Charlene takes her change, mindlessly tells the cashier "I love you," turns a shade of red previously unknown to exist in nature, and we scurry out the door.

Charlene either made that lady's day, or really freaked her out. The next week, there was a sign in the store reading, "Please don't tell our cashiers you love them. They find it disconcerting."

These foibles are usually too off-putting to explain. We're in a mild state of shock. We're too busy wondering, *"Did I just say that?"* to consider how to explain the weird thing we just said. So we retreat. At least I did. Do.

It was some 35 years ago. I was on a first date at the drive-in theater. First dates for me were like being on trial for being a doofus. When the night was done, would I be convicted? I can't tell you how many first dates I came home from after my having pronounced sentence: *"You. Will. Never. Date. Again."*

Actually, it wasn't all that many. I maybe had five first dates. Total.

On this particular date, she was telling me something about her brother. An impressive story.

I replied with, "Sounds like he's got guts!" But at the last micro-second, my brain told me to change "guts" to another word.   My mouth combined the two words, thus creating a third word *that actually fit the occasion (!)* yet was wholly inappropriate and just plain weird (and which my wife just told me I can't reveal)!

In the confines of the car, there was no escape! The double-feature hadn't even started! For four hours I silently sentenced myself to a future without women.

My verbal miscues at our monthly department head meetings are too many to mention. The most recent was an attempt at humor. Always a bad idea.

I'm currently designing the seminarian posters that are placed in all the churches. So, I tell everyone, including the bishop, that this year, after printing their name and seminary on the poster, we're going to also list on the poster their favorite Star Wars character, which for some bizarre reason, I thought was absolutely hilarious. My only question I asked myself as I prepared to speak was, how long will the laughter last? Might it seriously disrupt our meeting? Maybe I shouldn't say it. Maybe it was *just too hilarious.*

Instead of laughter, my comment was followed with deafening silence broken only by a barely audible pity chuckle, which could actually have been someone clearing their throat or adjusting their shoe.

"You. Will. Never. Try. To. Be. Funny. Again."

Then there is the printed word. The joy of printed foibles is that people will assume a mistake was made. You don't have that luxury with the spoken word. When my old paper in Denver made a computer "spelling correction" that changed "Western Slope" to "Western Slop" throughout an entire issue, people assumed computer error. But if I say "Western Slop" verbally, there's no excuse.

Such is the power of words. Jesus makes pretty clear that we're not supposed to judge. But we can analyze. We can study. We can theorize. As a writer, I tend to analyze words. I study the people who say them. What in their history would lead them to say such a thing? What is the purpose of using those particular words? What is their end game?

Based on my analysis and study, I theorize that God is bald. Because I can't imagine a God that hasn't pulled all His hair out by now.

People don't give enough power to words. We're in an age when "texting" or "tweeting" costs jobs and reputations.

Years ago a comedian said he wanted to shout the "n-word" from the rooftops to remove its power. I disagree. We need to know that there are lines good people don't cross. As the shield of political correctness is broken down, so is the wall that protects people from vile comments. Any acceptance of veiled racist and misogynistic statements is *too much* acceptance.

As we celebrate Respect Life Month, we can't be lulled into focusing only on the important issue of abortion, although important it is. We need to include in the pro-life descriptive the word "humanitarian".

Not to do so is to give permission to anti-life sentiment disguised as self-servitude, like disguising racism as a "fear of jobs being taken away". Or misogyny as a misplaced sense of male privilege. Or abortion as a "medical procedure."

We are using words to hide truth from ourselves.

Using words to bring derision to others is an attempt to impress upon him or her that they are not acceptable in the eyes of God or to their fellow human.

God *is* a woman. *And* man. God *is* Hispanic. *And* black. *And* white. God is *I am.*

I pray that all people will recognize the power of words, and that the impetus behind them may truly reflect the teachings of our Loving Lord, where there exists no hate, no fear — only love.