

Notre Dame Burning Reveals This Ugly Flaw in the Body of Christ

Like many of you, I watched in horror this week as the Cathedral of Notre Dame burned.

For several hundreds of years, Notre Dame has been a place of worship and a source of pride for the people of Paris and indeed, all of France. As a medieval piece of art, it is a gorgeous example of Gothic architecture. Hand-carved stone from the 1100s covers the flying buttresses and ceiling vaults. The stained glass reflects an attention to detail and skill seldom seen today.

The hushed silence you experience upon entering gives you the exact sensation the architects desired. You experience transcendence. You are small and maybe not as important as you thought when you walked in. While the tourists make more noise than I would like, the acoustics still make for an unbelievable experience. How can you say enough about entering into an environment like that?

Are there other cathedrals? Of course. Many are larger or even preferred, but there is only one Notre Dame.

That is why I am so grieved.

Today, while scrolling through social media, I saw a post lamenting the fire at Notre Dame. A comment on the post mentioned that the building was not as important as the people. The commenter then went on to talk about the church and its abuses and problems.

I was brokenhearted.

We live in a world where you can't comment, share a thought or

a feeling without someone countering you. The original post was about the loss of the structure. Instead of echoing those sentiments, the comment was an “at least” or a “what about” or a “who cares...”

Man, do I hate that.

You can always have a “gotcha” moment. There are endless opportunities to point out places where people don’t see the entire picture. But when we share our “at least,” “what about” or “who cares,” we invalidate the original position.

Think of it this way.

Someone says, “I broke my leg.” The interlocutor interjects, “At least you didn’t break both.” “At least you have a leg to break.” Maybe in their efforts to help, they say, “What about all those who don’t have any legs?” Perhaps my least favorite is, “Who cares? There are a lot of people with worse things going on.”

In each instance, the person who stated their leg is broken is left with the idea that their pain isn’t that bad. They need to quit whining. Even worse, you and your feelings don’t matter. While none of these may be intended, they are communicated.

When people are in pain or mourning, it is a good idea to be with them. Join them in their pain. Don’t worry about your own stuff in that moment. Resist the urge to make it better or to show them how it really isn’t all that bad. Suffer with them.

If someone says “I broke my leg, ” you can offer an, “I’m so sorry.” A great question you can ask is, “Is there anything I can do for you?” Maybe you can ask about how much pain they are in, if they need a ride, how long they may be out of pocket. There are a number of ways you can be with people in the middle of their pain. None of them look like the social media comment above.

We are quickly losing the art of being with one another. We are losing dignity. We have to regain it. There is going to be an enormous restoration work at the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Perhaps, like that work, we can claim some things from the fire we've set. Instead of pointing out how wrong people are, maybe we can learn to be empathetic with one another. We can begin the work of restoration in our lives as well. This work will be long and difficult, but it may produce a beacon of beauty and dignity. It may very well rise from the ashes we have made in our own culture to reveal grace and mercy and point the way to something so much bigger and better than ourselves.

In the meantime, we lament for what is lost and walk with those who hurt. {eoa}

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