

February 28, 2020

Triage

Last summer Andrea and I spent a week in Quebec. On the second day of our trip we took a bicycle tour of the island Île d'Orléans in the Saint Lawrence river. Or I should say, we were *going* to take a bicycle tour. Andrea had a bicycle accident and we ended up rushing to the emergency room instead. It was clear to me that she had a broken nose plus a deep cut on the bridge of her nose.

At the emergency room, after an initial check-in and a brief examination of Andrea, we were invited to the waiting room until a doctor was available. During the seven hours we waited (yes, seven!), I noticed a huge sign on the wall, and, while it was written in French, I got the gist of it. More serious emergencies would be given priority. Of course, that made sense. In the case of something life-threatening where time is of the essence, those cases must be handled first. But in the moment, I thought Andrea's suffering should have been given more consideration. She was bleeding for heaven's sake! I began to understand that though one can make a case that suffering is suffering, some suffering is worse.

One of the church's missions is to minister to the suffering in the world. We don't always get to choose how it shows up at our door. Sometimes the best we can do is triage. We try to alleviate suffering the best we can. Sometimes, we too, must decide about whose suffering is worse.

You may have heard of the term "white tears." It describes the emotional state of white people when confronted with racism. Rather than focusing on the lived experiences and traumas of people of color when talking about racism, the focus is placed on the host of emotions that white people go through when working through personal learning about racism. White tears can shift the focus and care to themselves and not to the person who is suffering more acutely and systemically.

It's not that we shouldn't cry about what is a painful lesson, but we must keep it in perspective. This information may hurt deeply, but it's not the same as dealing with racism every day for one's entire life. It is important for white people to think about how people of color might feel daily from having to deal with racist institutions, interpersonal relationships and ideologies. Can we dry the white tears of our hurt feelings and open our hearts to the serious suffering around us?