

Death Row Inmate Finds Redemption Like Criminal on the Cross

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It was moments before death and after time spent dwelling on his upcoming execution, that the repentant thief found salvation in Jesus Christ.

This is reminiscent of the situation surrounding convicted murderer John Henry Ramirez.

Ramirez was convicted in 2004 for the murder of Pablo Castro. Castro was a convenience store worker, father of nine and grandfather to 14. Ramirez proceeded to stab Castro 29 times during a robbery of a total of \$. His crimes were heinous by all accounts, and he has admitted to this and allegedly repented of this act.

Ramirez was apprehended after three years on the run having fled to Mexico to evade authorities.

While Ramirez was in jail, God was planning an unlikely visitor for him. Janice Trujillo, a retired teacher, taught a women's Bible study at the county jail. She was approached by a chaplain to see if she would visit Ramirez, and at first she was understandably apprehensive:

"I just prayed and prayed and prayed before I went in," Trujillo says. "Because this man stabbed somebody 29 times, and I just didn't know what to say to him. So, I said, 'God, you're going to have to be the one to talk to him.'"

Over the years, Ramirez and Trujillo built a relationship where they would refer to one another as "godmother" and "godson."

Eventually, Ramirez asked Trujillo if there was a church that would accept him, considering his extraordinary circumstances. She had been sharing his story with her church, where Pastor Dana Moore presided over the Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, Texas. Many of the congregants knew of Ramirez without ever meeting him, and were willing to accept him into their congregation.

Since Ramirez could not physically approach the altar at the end of service to join, he did what he could and wrote them a letter sharing his desire to join their church.

As time went by, and Trujillo was no longer able to make the 300-mile drive to the prison due to age, the Lord put it on Pastor Dana's heart to do something about it. He recalled God opening the door to him, "It was almost like God was saying, 'Here you go, Dana. Are you going to pick up the slack?'"

"It's one of my church members," the pastor surmised. "Am I not going to go see him?"

As their monthly meetings continued, and the time for Ramirez's execution drew closer, they eventually learned the exact date of the execution: Sept. 8, 2021.

Upon learning this, Ramirez asked for Moore to be in the chamber with him as his life came to an end. After initially being denied, prison officials granted this request to have Ramirez's pastor and spiritual mentor be present with him.

Ramirez asked that Moore be allowed to lay hands on him and pray over him. He felt this was an important act of demonstrating his faith. This request was denied by the state of Texas, and so Ramirez appealed and then sued arguing that his First Amendment rights were being violated.

His case would make its way to the Supreme Court, which ruled 8-1 in his favor, and allowed Moore to lay hands on and pray for Ramirez when he was to be executed.

Pastor Moore was in full support of this, as he explained in an affidavit, "Human touch has significance and power," he wrote. "Many miracles of Jesus were performed by touching.

"I need to be in physical contact with John Ramirez during the most stressful and difficult time of his life," the pastor explained, "in order to give him comfort."

Ramirez's day of reckoning for his crime eventually did come.

While all evidence points to Ramirez's sincere repentance, only God knows what is in the heart. Much like David who had to suffer for his sin with Bathsheba with the death of his child (2 Sam. 12), so too did Ramirez pay for his crimes on earth.

Thankfully, the Lord still forgives in heaven where all sin is washed away.

As the execution proceeded, Pastor Moore laid his hand on John's chest and held it there the whole time while praying, "Look upon John with your grace," he said. "Grant him peace. Grant all of us peace." He also referenced "the Lord is my shepherd."

In the closing of Moore's prayer, Ramirez responded, "Amen."

Ramirez was pronounced dead at 6:41 p.m. CST on Oct. 5, 2022.

The son of Pablo Castro issued a statement after the execution took place, and said in part, "God is the only Judge, jury and verdict in the end for all of us. Who are we to hold hate, anger and vengeance on our mind?" {eoa}

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