

**April 18, 2021 – Third Sunday of Easter:** <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/041821.cfm>

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9

1 Jn 2:1-5a

Lk 24:35-48

*Br. Steve Herro, O. Praem.*

“...Proximity to the condemned and incarcerated made the question of each person’s humanity more urgent and meaningful, including my own...” Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, 2014.

The bulk of the text in the first reading is the second of three courageous public speeches by Peter in the Acts of the Apostles (see Acts 2: 14-36, Acts 3: 11-26, Acts 10: 34-43). Luke goes to great pains to demonstrate Peter’s leadership in these speeches; Peter has come a long way from the follower who denied Jesus three times (Luke 23: 54-65).

When I read Peter’s speech in the First Reading, Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19, I was touched by Peter’s words (Acts 3: 15), “...The author of life you put to death but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses...” Peter not only uses language and images of Jesus’ execution while introducing Jews to the special status of Jesus of Nazareth, he also reminds them and us that a murderer was released at the time of Jesus’ trial.

I am reminded of the work of Bryan Stevenson and the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) (Montgomery, Alabama). As Peter reminded his audience how Jesus’ opponents sentenced an innocent man to die, I thought of the many innocent people that Stevenson and his staff have gone to bat for, those on death row and subjected to other forms of excessive punishment in various states of the U.S. Jesus the executed is a star actor in Peter’s speech.

Peter reminds us that the executed Messiah was bound to suffer and that bold spokespersons often come from within their own communities. Moses spoke of this in Deut 18: 15 but it is as valid for us today. Indeed, I am writing this two days before the 41st anniversary of the murder of Saint Oscar Romero and the Third Sunday of Easter is two weeks after the 53rd anniversary of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King.

As Peter emphasized the circumstances around the death of Jesus, in a major public speech soon after the Ascension of Jesus, it behooves us to remember that even amidst the glorious and joyful images surrounding the resurrection of Christ, the seminal event in Christianity cannot be separated from unjust judgements and executions that existed in Jesus’ time and in our own culture.

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