

March 7

Perpetua, Felicity and their Companions

Martyrs at Carthage, 202

Vibia Perpetua, born in 181, was a young widow, mother of an infant, and owner of several slaves, including Felicitas and Revocatus. With two other young Carthaginians, Secundulus and Saturninus, they were catechumens preparing for baptism.

Early in the third century, Emperor Septimius Severus decreed that all persons should sacrifice to the divinity of the emperor. There was no way that a Christian, confessing faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, could do this. Perpetua and her companions were arrested and held in prison under miserable conditions.

In a document attributed to Perpetua, we learn of visions she had in prison. One was of a ladder to heaven, which she climbed to reach a large garden; another was of her brother who had died when young of a dreadful disease, but was now well and drinking the water of life; the last was of herself as a warrior battling the Devil and defeating him to win entrance to the gate of life. “And I awoke, understanding that I should fight, not with beasts, but with the Devil . . . So much about me up to the day before the games; let him who will write of what happened then.”

At the public hearing before the Proconsul, she refused even the entreaties of her aged father, saying, “I am a Christian.”

On March 7, 203, Perpetua and her companions, encouraging one another to bear bravely whatever pain they might suffer, were sent to the arena to be mangled by a leopard, a boar, a bear, and a savage cow. Perpetua and Felicitas, tossed by the cow, were bruised and disheveled, but Perpetua, “lost in spirit and ecstasy,” hardly knew that anything had happened. To her companions she cried, “Stand fast in the faith and love one another. And do not let what we suffer be a stumbling block to you.”

MARCH 7

Eventually, all were put to death by a stroke of a sword through the throat. The soldier who struck Perpetua was inept. His first blow merely pierced her throat between the bones. She shrieked with pain, then aided the man to guide the sword properly. The report of her death concludes, “Perhaps so great a woman, feared by the unclean spirit, could not have been killed unless she so willed it.”



Rite I O God, the King of Saints, who didst strengthen thy servants Perpetua, Felicity, and their companions to make a good confession and encourage one another in the time of trial: Grant that we who cherish their blessed memory may be encouraged by their prayers to share their pure and steadfast faith and win with them the palm of victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Rite II O God, the King of Saints, who strengthened your servants Perpetua, Felicity, and their companions to make a good confession and encourage one another in the time of trial: Grant that we who cherish their blessed memory may be encouraged by their prayers to share their pure and steadfast faith and win with them the palm of victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

For Liturgical Celebration: [Common of a Martyr, A7] [Of the Holy Cross, A41]

MARCH 7