



Patron Saints of Widows, Mothers of Deceased Sons, Mothers, Expectant Mothers, Ranchers, Butchers

With details concerning the lives of many early martyrs unclear and often based on legend, we are fortunate to have the actual record of the courage of Perpetua and Felicity from the hand of Perpetua herself, her teacher Saturus, and others who knew them. This account, known as "*The Passion of St. Perpetua, St. Felicitas, and their Companions*," was so popular in the early centuries that it was read during liturgies.

In the year 203, Vivia Perpetua, a well-educated noblewoman living in Africa, made the decision to follow the path of her mother and become a Christian, although she knew it could mean her death during the persecutions ordered by the Emperor Severus. Her surviving brother (another brother had died when he was seven) followed her leadership and became a catechumen as well, meaning he would receive instruction from a Catechist in the Catholic Christian faith and be prepared for Baptism.

Her pagan father was frantic with worry and tried to talk her out of her decision. At 22-years-old, the well-educated, high-spirited woman had every reason to want to live -- including a baby son whom she was still nursing. We know she was married, but since her husband is never mentioned, many historians assume she was already a widow.

Perpetua's answer was simple and clear. Pointing to a water jug, she asked her father, "*See that pot lying there? Can you call it by any other name than what it is?*"

Her father answered, "Of course not." Perpetua responded, "*Neither can I call myself by any other name than what I am -- a Christian.*"

This answer upset her father and he attacked her. Perpetua reports that after that incident she was glad to be separated from him for a few days -- even though that separation was the result of her arrest and imprisonment.

Perpetua was arrested with four other catechumens, including two slaves, Felicity and Revocatus, and Saturninus and Secundulus. Their instructor in the faith, Saturus, chose to share their punishment and was also imprisoned.

Perpetua was baptized before taken to prison. She was known for her gift of "the Lord's speech" and receiving messages from God. She tells us that at the time of her baptism she was told to pray for nothing but endurance in the face of her trials.

The prison was so crowded with people that the heat was suffocating. There was no light anywhere and Perpetua "had never known such darkness." The soldiers who arrested and guarded them pushed and shoved them without any concern. Perpetua had no trouble admitting she was very afraid, but during all this horror, **her most excruciating pain came from being separated from her baby.**

The young slave, Felicity was even worse off, for Felicity suffered the stifling heat, overcrowding, and rough handling **while being eight months pregnant.**

Two deacons who ministered to the prisoners paid the guards to place the martyrs in a better part of the prison. There, her mother and brother were able to visit Perpetua and bring her baby to her. When she received permission for her baby to stay with her she recalled, "*my prison suddenly became a palace for me.*" Once more her father came to her, begging her to give in, kissing her hands, and throwing himself at her feet. She told him, "*We lie not in our own power but in the power of God.*"



When she and the others were taken to be examined and sentenced, her father followed, pleading with her and the judge. The judge, out of pity, also tried to get Perpetua to change her mind, but when she stood fast, she was sentenced with the others to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena.

Meanwhile, Felicity was also in torment. It was against the law for pregnant women to be executed. To kill a child in the womb was shedding innocent and sacred blood. Felicity was afraid that she would not give birth before the day set for their martyrdom and her companions would go on their journey without her. Her friends also didn't want to leave so "good a comrade" behind.

Two days before the execution, Felicity went into a painful labor. The guards made fun of her, insulting her by saying, "If you think you suffer now, how will stand it when you face the wild beasts?" Felicity answered them calmly, *"Now I'm the one who is suffering, but in the arena, another will be in me suffering for me because I will be suffering for him."*

She gave birth to a healthy girl who was adopted and raised by one of the Christian women of Carthage.

The officers of the prison began to recognize the power of the Christians and the strength and leadership of Perpetua. In some cases, this helped the Christians: the warden let them have visitors -- and later became a believer. But in other cases, it caused superstitious terror, as when one officer refused to let them get cleaned up on the day they were going to die for fear they'd try some sort of spell. Perpetua immediately spoke up, *"We're supposed to die in honor of Caesar's birthday. Wouldn't it look better for you if we looked better?"* The officer blushed with shame at her reproach and started to treat them better.

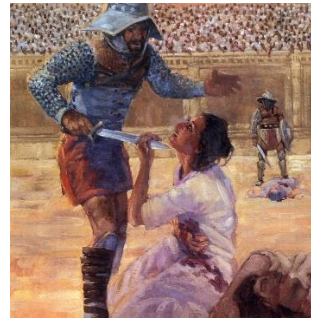
There was a feast the day before the games, so that the crowd could see the martyrs and make fun of them. But the martyrs turned this all around by laughing at the crowd for not being Christians and exhorting them to follow their example.

The four new Christians and their teacher went to the arena (the fifth, Secundulus, had died in prison) with joy and calm. Perpetua in usual high spirits met the eyes of everyone along the way. We are told she walked with "shining steps as the true wife of Christ, the darling of God."

When those at the arena tried to force Perpetua and the rest to dress in robes dedicated to their gods, Perpetua challenged her executioners. *"We came to die out of our own free will so we wouldn't lose our freedom to worship our God. We gave you our lives so that we wouldn't have to worship your gods."* She and the others were allowed to keep their clothes.

The men were attacked by bears, leopards, and wild boars. The women were stripped to face a rabid heifer. The two were thrown out and attacked, but the crowd cried out they had had enough. The women were removed and clothed again. Perpetua and Felicity were thrown back into the arena to face the gladiators.

Perpetua called out to her brother and other Christians, *"Stand fast in the faith, and love one another. Do not let our sufferings be a stumbling block to you."*



Perpetua and Felicity stood side by side and were killed by sword at Carthage in the Roman province of Africa.

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=48

The Chaplet of Saints Perpetua and Felicity (modified from a Novena)



Opening Prayer (Medal) O God, at the urging of whose love the Martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity defied their persecutors and overcame the torment of death, grant, we ask, by their prayers, that we may ever grow in your love. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

V. You have crowned them with glory and honour, O Lord.

R. And have set them over the works of your hands.

*For theirs is * the kingdom of heaven, who have despised the life of the world, and have attained the rewards of the kingdom, and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.*

Prayer

Grant, we beseech you, O Lord our God, that we may venerate with unceasing devotion the triumphs of your holy Martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas; and although we cannot pay them the honour that is their due, may we at least present to them our humble homage. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

– From: *An Approved English Translation of the Breviarium Romanum*, Burns and Oates, London, 1964

Day 1 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you lived in a pagan society but chose to become Christians and to follow Christ. This choice to follow Christ came at a great cost, because the Christian faith was not allowed in your society. Despite this cost, you did not waver in your faith. Imprisonment, mockery, and threats did nothing to keep you from serving Christ. You remained faithful to Christ and His Church through great sufferings, until you finally gave up your life for Him. Pray that I may also choose to be as steadfast in my own faith against the influences of the world as you were, no matter what it may cost me. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 2 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you willingly endured a brutal imprisonment in a dark, overcrowded prison for the sake of Christ. You were not willing to renounce your Christian faith, no matter how severely you had to suffer for it. The conditions you endured were so harsh that many would have despaired or given up their faith in order to escape. But you did not let your trials keep you from serving Christ. Instead, you bore your harsh sufferings joyfully, knowing that the reward would be great in heaven. Help me to endure my trials, no matter how overwhelming they might feel. Help me to embrace them with joyful submission as you did for love of God. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that we may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that we may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 3 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you exhorted one another and your other fellow prisoners to holiness, as you prepared to die together. You thought not of yourselves or of your own sufferings, but instead looked to your brothers and sisters. You did your best to best to encourage them in their

darkest time and to raise their minds and hearts to God amidst their sufferings. Even though you were suffering just as much as they were, you thought more of their struggles than of your own. Pray that I may be filled with a deep love of neighbor like you showed to your fellow Christian prisoners. Pray that I may show others such a deep charity even when I am suffering myself. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 4 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you remained steadfast in your path toward martyrdom. You held fast despite the efforts of family and even those in charge of your punishment to dissuade you from devotion to Christ. It would have been much easier for you to give up and return to the pagan faith of those around you, but you knew that dying for Christ was worth more than the world could offer you. You knew that the reward for your steadfast faith and courage would be great in heaven. Pray for me, that I may remain steadfast in my own faith, despite the efforts of the devil and the world to lead me away from Christ. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 5 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you said that you could not be called by any other name than what you were: a Christian. You were happy to be called Christians, though you lived in a society that hated and persecuted followers of Christ. You embraced not only the title given to followers of Christ, but the characteristics of a Christian as well. Your example of love and courage showed others what it means to be a Christian, and you did not let the ill-treatment you received deter you from the path of virtue. As I strive to follow Christ amidst the hostilities of modern society, help me to joyfully embrace the title of Christian like you did. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as

faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 6 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you looked to one another as a source of strength amidst the terrible suffering and persecution you endured. You knew that you could help give one another the strength necessary to die well for the sake of Christ. Your bond grew closer with one another as the time of your death drew near, and you both grew more fervent in the faith that was leading you to martyrdom. You hoped to be able to die together, knowing that you were gifts from God to one another in this trial. Help me to see my brothers and sisters in Christ as the gift that they are and as sources of strength, when I am at my lowest. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 7 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, we know from recorded eyewitness accounts that you showed great strength and courage as your martyrdom approached. We know that you thought more of your brothers and sisters than of yourself as the time for you to die drew near. Rather than dwelling on your own suffering, you encouraged your fellow Christians as they went to meet their brutal martyrdom. You called out to them, “Stand fast in the faith, and love one another. Do not let our sufferings be a stumbling block to you.” Pray for me, that I may be a help and encouragement to my brothers and sister in Christ on their path to heaven. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 8 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you so impressed your jailors with your holiness and strength that they began to fear you and to question

where your strength came from. They did not expect to see such courage or selflessness among prisoners waiting to meet a brutal death. Instead of dwelling on your sufferings and fearing to die, you surprised them by showing unimaginable virtue amidst your sufferings. You even led your jailer to faith in Christ by your holy example. Pray for me, that my example may never lead others astray. Pray that I may instead be a strong example of a holy Christian and lead others to Christ through that example. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

Day 9 Saints Perpetua and Felicity, you put love of Christ above all other earthly loves, even love for your family. Though it pained you greatly, you even left behind the children that you loved so much, in order to serve Christ. You knew that your family members were gifts from God, but you did not let the painful separation from them become a stumbling block on your path to serve God. Though you loved your family dearly, you loved Christ even more. Pray for me, that I may love Christ with a love that places Him above all others. Pray that I may be ready even to die for Him as you did. Please also pray for (*mention your intention here*). Lord God, grant that I may love and serve You as faithfully as Your martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity, so that I may someday join them to praise You in Heaven. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be

<https://www.praymorenovenas.com/novena-to-saints-perpetua-and-felicity>

CLOSING PRAYER: Father, your love gave the saints Perpetua and Felicity courage to suffer a cruel martyrdom. By their prayers, help us to grow in love of you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

<https://prayers4reparation.wordpress.com/2013/02/17/prayer-to-st-perpetua-and-st-felicity/>