

Vivia Perpetua and Felicity

Saint Name: Sts. Perpetua and Felicity

Dates: Late 2nd century – 203 AD

Location: Africa

Feast Day: March 7



Sts. Perpetua and Felicity were Christian martyrs who lived during the early persecution of the Church in Africa by the Emperor Severus. Vivia Perpetua came from a wealthy family; Felicity was a slave who worked in Perpetua's house. In the year 203, Perpetua, a well-educated noblewoman, made the decision to follow her mother's religion – Christianity. Being a pagan, her father begged her to give up her Christian faith for fear of persecution. Despite these pleas, Perpetua remained firm in her faith. This angered her father to the point that he attacked her and she left his house. Without her father's protection, Perpetua was arrested with four other catechumens, including the two slaves Felicity and Revocatus. Their instructor, a layman (Saturus) who converted them in the faith volunteered to be imprisoned with them. Perpetua was baptized before taken to prison and shortly after that her father came and took her infant son. Perpetua was known to receive messages from God. She said that at the time of her baptism she was told to pray for nothing but endurance in the face of her trials. Felicity was pregnant and remained steadfast in her faith. The prison where they were held was so crowded and hot that the soldiers who arrested and guarded them pushed and shoved with little regard. Perpetua was afraid but amidst all this horror her most excruciating pain came from being separated from her child. For Felicity, it was worse - she suffered through the stifling heat, overcrowding, and rough handling while eight months pregnant. When Perpetua and the other martyrs were taken to appear before the judge, Perpetua's father pleaded with her to renounce Christianity, but she refused and was sentenced with the others to be thrown to the beasts in the amphitheater before finally being beheaded. The executioner was so shaken up by her aristocratic appearance that she herself had to guide his blade to her neck. It was against the law for pregnant women to be executed. To kill a child in the womb was shedding innocent and sacred blood. 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 you stand it when you face the wild beasts?" Felicity calmly answered, "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." Felicity gave birth to a healthy daughter who was adopted by a Christian woman in Carthage. These women and their companions were executed in the year 203, mauled by wild animals and then beheaded by gladiators. Their faith was so strong and compelling that one of their guards converted to Christianity. Details concerning early martyrs are often unclear and based on legend, but we are fortunate to have actual records of the courage of Perpetua and Felicity from the hand of Perpetua, Saturus, and others. This account is known as "The Passion of St. Perpetua, St. Felicitas, and their Companions".

The Church honors both Perpetua and Felicity as saints. They are examples to remind us to thank God for making us his children in the sacrament of Baptism. Perpetua and Felicity are the patron saints of mothers, expectant mothers, ranchers, and butchers. Their feast day is celebrated on March 7.