

WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

STs. FELICITY AND PERPETUA



“For this cause we came willingly unto this, that our liberty might not be obscured; for this cause have we devoted our lives, that we may do no such thing.”

Northern African Christians faced severe persecution during the third century. Even when it was not widespread, Roman governors made examples out of some Christians, particularly converts. St. Felicity was a catechumen, while St. Perpetua was a woman of noble birth, whose father was a pagan. They were killed in the amphitheater of Carthage in AD 203.

The story of their suffering amazes us because of these women’s courage and boldness. They did not shrink back at all, telling the crowds who witnessed their executions that God would judge them. Wild animals were released upon them, and they contended with the beasts before being put to death by the swords of Roman soldiers.

Perhaps the most riveting aspect of the story is the role of family. Perpetua was a mother of a small child, and Felicity gave birth during

her imprisonment. We would sympathize with a mother who feigned allegiance to a governor, so that her children would not grow up without a mother. Furthermore, Perpetua’s father visited her in prison, imploring her to sacrifice to the emperor so that he would not have to watch her die. At one point, the father himself was physically punished, merely because of his association with his daughter.

On the other hand, Felicity, Perpetua, and their companions supported one another. Their suffering strained the bonds of biological family, but it strengthened the bonds of spiritual family. When we are baptized, we are born into the family of God, and this is the family against which all others are measured.

Certainly, a supportive, Christian mother and father is ideal. Perpetua shows us a woman who contended with an unsupportive father. Both martyrs put loyalty to Christ above all other duties. In the face of adversity, Sts. Felicity and Perpetua clung to Jesus.

Let us remember that we are family, and we owe one another support. Let us pray in solidarity with Christians who suffer persecution so that, when persecutors tempt us to compromise, we can as one family of God say, “We may do no such thing.”

Sts. Felicity and Perpetua, pray for us!



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