

Readings for Thursday, March 6, 2025

Perpetua and Felicity – *Martyrs, 202*

Psalm 124

- 1 If it had not been the Lord who was on our side
—let Israel now say—
- 2 if it had not been the Lord who was on our side,
when our enemies attacked us,
- 3 then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
- 4 then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
- 5 then over us would have gone
the raging waters.
- 6 Blessed be the Lord,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth.
- 7 We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

Hebrews 10:32-39

But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet 'in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.' But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.

Matthew 24:9-14

'Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But anyone who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

Collect:

O God, the King of Saints, who strengthened your servants Perpetua, Felicity, and their companions to make a good confession and to encourage one another in the time of trial: Grant that we who cherish their blessed memory may 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, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Perpetua and Felicity

Martyrs, 202

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

Early in the third century, Emperor Septimius Severus decreed that all persons should sacrifice to the emperor. Many Christians, confessing faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, believed that they could not do this. Perpetua, Felicity, and the other catechumens were arrested and held in prison under miserable conditions. At the public hearing before the proconsul, Perpetua refused even the entreaties of her aged father. Pointing to a water pot, she asked him, "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 name other than what I am—a Christian."

Felicity was eight months pregnant at the time they were arrested. Because pregnant women could not be executed, she was anxious lest the others be executed apart from her, while she would be condemned to die at another time alone. Two days before the scheduled execution, however, she gave birth to a baby girl, who was adopted and raised by an anonymous Christian woman in Carthage.

A document that is attributed to Perpetua recounts the visions that she had while 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."

On March 7, 203, Perpetua and Felicity, 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 Felicity, 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."

Eventually, both Perpetua and Felicity 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."