

Lenten Reflection Week 1, 7th March 2022

PERPETUA AND FELICITY

"'Father,' said I, 'do you see this vase lying here, for example, this small water jug or whatever?'

'Yes, I do', said he.

And I told him: 'Could it be called by any other name than what it is?'

And he said: 'No.'

'Well, so too I am unable to call myself other than what I am, a Christian.'"

These are the words written down in her prison diary by St Perpetua whose feast, together with that of her companion St Felicity, is celebrated today. She was a wealthy young mother of twenty-two when she and her pregnant slave Felicity were imprisoned during a persecution of Christians in the Roman province of Africa (modern Tunisia). Her journal recounts her trial and imprisonment and was completed by a contemporary who described the deaths of Perpetua and Felicity in the amphitheatre at Carthage in March 203. Perpetua's account is one of the rare surviving documents written by a woman in the ancient world.

Just before the conversation recorded above, Perpetua's father, whom she later tells us was "sick with worry" about her, attempts to change her mind and shake her resolve but she remains steadfast.

On this first Monday of Lent do Perpetua and Felicity have a message for us?

In Ireland we have no fear of being publicly put to death for our faith, but during the next 40 days how is each of us being invited to show that "I am unable to call myself other than what I am, a Christian"?

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