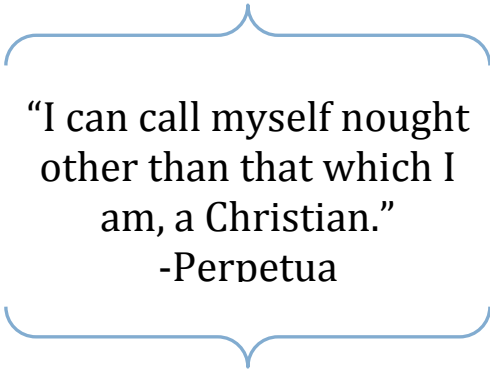

STS. PERPETUA AND FELICITY

Sts. Perpetua and Felicity were two young women who chose to die as martyrs under the Roman empire. Perpetua's account, "[The Passion of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity](#)," (203 CE) which scholars today believe to be indeed her own work, is one of the earliest surviving examples of Christian writing by a woman. Perpetua and Felicity are honored today in many ways, for example, as a model of interclass and perhaps interracial friendship and love (Perpetua was a wealthy noblewoman and Felicity a slave). Others choose to remember Perpetua and Felicity as exemplars of Christian same-sex friendship and love, mindful of how they walked to their deaths together after sharing a kiss of peace. Both women were also mothers and highly respected members of their Christian community.



"I can call myself nought
other than that which I
am, a Christian."
-Perpetua

Whatever the relationship between Perpetua and Felicity may have been in life, Perpetua's account offers rich spiritual resources for LGBTQ and allied people of faith.

Perpetua received the gift of visions, and in one of her visions she experienced herself embodied as male and physically fighting the Devil. Hers is an early example of the challenge to rigid gender roles and stereotypes that LGBTQ people of faith offer the Church today. Both Perpetua and Felicity bravely chose to separate themselves from their families in order to pursue what they saw as their destiny of martyrdom. Many people of faith today, LGBTQ persons among them, have suffered with the need to choose between the path espoused by family members and the calling placed in their hearts by God.

As LGBTQ people do today in Pride celebrations, Perpetua insisted on the martyrs presenting themselves as they wished to be seen, not as their oppressors wanted to see them. As she went to her death, Perpetua argued with the Roman captors so the martyrs could be allowed to die wearing their own clothes. In the midst of her torture, she even adjusted her hair to appear more dignified, so she would be seen to be welcoming and not mourning her own death. Although her captors wanted her body to be a site of suffering and shame, Perpetua insisted on her own beauty, dignity, and agency over her body.

To Christians today who wish to promote peace and avoid glorifying violence, it might seem strange to celebrate two women who chose a violent death in order to witness to their belief in God. But the story of Perpetua and Felicity reminds us that even if we will not be called to face martyrdom, very few of us can escape making painful choices in our lives of faith. God's plan for us may force us to encounter risk and danger and even to leave behind loved ones and friends. But what the story of Perpetua and Felicity promises us is that God will not leave us bereft, either of the Divine presence or of beloved ones to walk the difficult path with us.

PRAY

God, Perpetua and Felicity faced fear with love, met cruelty with kindness, and encountered the unknown with arms wide open. As I struggle in life, help me to live each day as Perpetua and Felicity did: fearlessly and with knowledge that I am a child of God. Amen.