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Perpetua was a Christian noblewoman who, at the end of the second century, lived in Carthage (North Africa). Her Christian courage and steadfastness so impressed the famous theologian Augustine that he preached four sermons about her witness for Christ.

Persecution

In AD 202 when the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus determined to eradicate the vibrant Christian community in North Africa, Perpetua, a 22-year-old mother, was among the first to be arrested.

Parental Pressure

From her diary, and that of another prisoner, we have some insights as to her witness in prison. Her pagan father visited her and pleaded with her to deny that she was a Christian. Perpetua responded that it was impossible that she "be called anything than what I am, a Christian."

Some days later, when her father again visited her, Perpetua was nursing her young son. The father pleaded with her: "Have pity on my grey head. Have pity on me, your father do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers; think of your mother and your aunt; think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride!"

Steadfast

Perpetua remained steadfast. "It will all happen in the prisoner's dock as God wills, for you may be sure that we are not left to ourselves but are all in His power."

On Trial

On the day of her trial, Perpetua and her friends were marched before the governor Hilarianus. The friends of Perpetua were questioned first. Each of them readily admitted to being a Christian and each refused to make an act of Emperor worship.

As the governor turned to question Perpetua, her father, carrying Perpetua's son in his arms, dramatically rushed to Perpetua and, grabbing hold of her arm, pleaded: "Perform the sacrifice. Have pity on your baby!"

The governor,

Hilarius, added: *"Have pity on your father's grey head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the Emperor."*

The response of Perpetua was straightforward: *"I will not."*

"Are you a Christian then?" asked the governor.

"Yes, I am," Perpetua responded decisively.

The Roman governor then condemned Perpetua and her friends to be thrown to the wild beasts and to die in the arena.

In the Arena

When Perpetua and her friends entered the stadium they were dressed in belted tunics and they were singing Psalms. The amphitheatre was filled with nobles, ladies, senators and ambassadors, and tens of thousands shouted their insults and derisions as she was led to her death. Wild beasts and gladiators circled them on the arena floor and the crowds in the stands roared, demanding to see blood. Because of their joyful demeanour the crowd demanded that the Christians be scourged first. This was done.

As the mob screamed abuse, Perpetua was heard to say: *"You have condemned us, but God will condemn you."*

Courage

A wild heifer charged and tossed Perpetua into the air. As she fell on her back she sat up and adjusted her ripped tunic, *"thinking more of her modesty than of her pain."* She then walked over to help Felicitas, her servant to her feet. Perpetua encouraged the other Christians: *"You must all stand fast in the Faith and not be weakened by what we have gone through."*

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Then a starved leopard, which had been goaded, was let loose, but it would not harm Perpetua. The impatient crowd began to scream for the death of the Christians. Perpetua, Felicitas and their Christian friends were lined up and one by one they were slain with the sword by gladiators.

Perpetual Faithfulness

Perpetua was only 22 years old when she died in the arena in Carthage. Her bold testimony: *"I am a Christian and cannot deny Christ"* was repeated throughout the empire. Those in the amphitheatre who had witnessed her martyrdom reported that Perpetua and Felicitas came into the arena *"joyfully as though they were on their way to Heaven."* Witnesses described Perpetua in the arena as *"young and beautiful"*, *"a pure and modest Christian lady"*, *"with shining countenance and calm step, as the beloved of God, as a bride of Christ, putting down*

everyone's stare by her own intense gaze." *As Perpetua means perpetual and Felicitas means faithful, their courageous martyrdom together spelled out what is today the motto of the Marines: Always Faithful.*

The Most Famous Female Martyr in the Roman Empire

Perpetua became the most famous Christian lady to die a martyr's death in the Roman Empire. Her example of Christian resolve and courage, choosing to suffer and die with a clear conscience, rather than deny her Saviour, inspired generations of Roman Christians to stand firm in the face of relentless persecution. Her published diary also made her the first female Christian author.

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the geniuses of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the Revelation of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 1:6-7

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The above article has been adapted from one of the 32 character studies in ***Victorious Christians ♦ Who Changed the World***, by Dr. Peter Hammond. The book is available from **[Christian Liberty Books](http://www.christianlibertybooks.co.za/contactus)** and also as an ***E-Book***.

Sunday, 9 November is the **International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted**. Visit **www.idop-africa.org** for resources, articles, PowerPoints and a ***video*** to help you mobilise your church to remember and support those suffering for the Faith.

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</p> <p align="left">See also:</p> <p>The Martyrs Prayer</p> <p>War Against Christians Intensifies</p> <p>Invitation to Join the Prayer Movement for the Persecuted</p> <p>Serving the Persecuted</p> <p>Persecution In the Bible</p> <p>Persecution in History</p>