

# The passion of perpetua and felicity



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The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity holds a unusual and important place in Western Civilization, in particular the Catholic Church. In 203, these two woman and four others were martyred near Carthage in Northern Africa because of their unwillingness to deny their Christian faith. This was not in itself unusual because martyrs were not unknown. What makes this martyrdom notable is the Perpetua kept a diary of the events from the time of her house arrest until her death under the sword after wild animals failed to kill her in the arena.

The diary was saved by an unknown Christian who added a prologue and described the final scene in the arena at the time of Perpetua's death. The effect Perpetua had on the Catholic Church based on her dreams/visions is immense. Perpetua had four visions while imprisoned by two are of particular interest. In her second and third visions Perpetua saw her brother Dinocrates, who had died at the age of seven, in a dark place with many others who were suffering greatly. She realized while still in the dream that she could pray for her brother and provide help for him.

Once the dream had ended, she began to do pray for Dinocrates. In the next dream/vision she again sees Dinocrates, but this time he was in a bright place, his body was clean, and he was refreshed. In later years these dreams provided data to the Catholic Church and its development of the concept of Purgatory. It became a part of Catholic doctrine that many people did not go directly to heaven upon death; they were not good enough to go to heaven, nor evil enough to go to hell.

In addition, because her prayers were efficacious, the Church concluded that people still alive on earth could have a positive affect on those in Purgatory and shorten their time there. Over time these this notion led to the ideas of indulgences whose effects were seen in the Crusades, corruption in the Church and had a part in the circumstances leading to the Reformation. It is interesting to consider how much effect an isolated event relative to a 22 year old woman can have for centuries.