

The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity

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The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity is the oldest surviving Christian material one may attribute to a definite historical woman. It records events of the persecution of Christians in Carthage, near modern Tunis in Tunisia in the year 203.

The text consists of five parts:

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| I.1–II.3 | An introduction written by an unknown editor |
| III.1–X.15 | The prison diary of Perpetua |
| XI.1 | The editor's linking verse |
| XI.2–XIII.8 | The dream of Saturus, one of her companions, taken from his prison diary |
| XIV.1–XXI.11 | The story of Felicity and the deaths of the martyrs, probably written by the editor. |

The account focuses on the deaths of two women, one a respectably well-off young married woman, and the other a pregnant slave. The narrative and visions provide models of behavior during persecution, the justification of the power of martyrs, and a variety of role models, especially for women. In the course of the narrative family relationships are eclipsed by relationships within the Christian community, the "family of faith." The more Perpetua separates herself from her natural family, the easier it becomes for her to take her place as the head of the Christian family in prison.

A number of details make this text particularly interesting. At III.6 it is necessary to understand that prisoners were not normally provided with food, water, and bedding by the prison authorities, but by their visitors. Absent visitors, guards supplemented their wages by selling provisions to prisoners.

Many commentators see the eating of the cheese at IV.9 as a reflection of the North African ritual of offering the newly baptized milk and honey to drink. Given Perpetua's status as a recent convert and her social and educational status, it is just as likely—or more likely—that the accent ought to be placed on eating food in another world as a way of insuring one's link to the world; for instance, Per-

sephone/Proserpina eating pomegranate seeds in the Underworld linking her to her new home.

Although not a part of modern judicial practice, torture (VI.2) was very common in the Roman Empire as a part of judicial investigation. In this case, what they confess is that they are Christians.

Perpetua's sexual transformation at X.7 has been the subject of many commentaries. Given the gender roles of antiquity, it is not surprising that she is transformed. It would have been unthinkable for her to have fought in the arena in a woman's body. Note that immediately upon her victory she is addressed as "daughter." Once the reason for her masculine body no longer exists, she returns to her previous identity.

At XIII.3 the text affirms that the martyrs enjoyed a higher authority than members of the clergy. This authority would remain unchallenged in North Africa until the episcopate of Cyprian of Carthage in the 250s.

The highly stylized apologetic introduction gives way quickly to the diaries of the martyrs. This translation and the enumeration of the sections are based on the critical edition published by Cornelius Ioannes Maria Van Beek (Nijmegen: Dekkers and Van de Vegt, 1936). Translation © Maureen A. Tilley, 1997. For an extended commentary on the text see Maureen A. Tilley, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity in Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2: *A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 829–58.

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[I.1] If we have recorded earlier accounts of faith testifying to God's grace and promoting popular edification in order to honor God and to comfort the reader by a recreation of the past events, why shouldn't we consider more recent examples equally appropriate to faith? [I.2] Perhaps these later stories may someday become ancient history, indispensable for those who are our successors, even though in our day they are accorded less authority out of some prejudicial deference to antiquity. [I.3] People who would like to limit the Holy Spirit to a single pattern for perfection for all time should consider this: these more recent events should be considered greater since they are closer to the end of time and to the fullness of grace allotted to the final days. [I.4] For "in the last days," says the Lord, "I shall pour out my Spirit on all of humanity and their sons and daughters will prophesy. I shall pour out my Spirit on my men servants and women servants. Young people will see visions and the old will dream dreams" [Acts 2:17–18; cf. Joel 2:28]. [I.5] So we who consider these new visions promised just as much as those prophecies acknowledge the rest of the virtues of the Holy Spirit as provisions for the Church to whom the same Spirit is sent to direct all the gifts for all the people, as the Lord distributes them to each person [1 Cor. 7:17; Rom. 12:3]. Therefore, we judge it imperative to place in order and produce these written accounts for the glory of God. In

this way people weak in faith and those on the verge of despair will not regard the grace of close association with the Divine as present or sent only in ancient times to those worthy of martyrdom or visions. They will realize that God always accomplishes what God promised not only for people who might be converted by such testimony but also for those who already believe in God's favor. [I.6] So brethren and dear children, we "announce to you what we heard and felt" so that you who are present now may recall the glory of the Lord, and those who now understand by hearing "may be in communion with" the holy martyrs, and through them with our Lord "Jesus Christ," to whom is "glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen" [1 John 1:1, 3].

[II.1] Some young catechumens were arrested: Revocatus and Felicity (his companion in service), Saturninus and Secundulus. Among them was Vibia Perpetua, nobly born, well educated, respectably married. [II.2] Her mother and father were still living, as well as two brothers, one a catechumen with her. She also had an infant son she was breast-feeding. She herself was about twenty-two years old. [II.3] She narrated this whole affair of the martyrdom herself. She has written it in her own hand and she leaves us her own impressions.

[III.1] "Then," she says, "while we were with the prison guards, my father wanted to dissuade me by arguing with me. He kept trying to shake my resolve because of his own love for me. I said, 'Father, do you see this vase lying here, which for the sake of a name we call "pitcher" or whatever?' And he said, 'I see it.' [III.2] Then I said to him, 'Can it be called by any other name than what it is?' And he said, 'No.' 'So too I cannot be called anything else except what I am, a Christian.' [III.3] Enraged by my words, my father pulled me toward himself, like he was going to gouge out my eyes. But he only shook me, and defeated, he left along with his diabolical arguments.

[III.4] "For a few days my father did not visit me. I thanked God, and I was comforted by his absence. [III.5] During this time we were baptized. The Spirit told me not to ask anything from the water except for patient endurance in the flesh.

"A few days later we were taken to prison and I was terrified because I had never experienced such darkness before. [III.6] What a rough time we had between the intense heat resulting from overcrowding and extortion by the soldiers! Then I was tormented with a brand new concern—my child. [III.7] At that point Tertius and Pomponius, the blessed deacons who ministered to us, made arrangements to bribe the guards so that we might be moved out to a better part of the prison. That way we could refresh ourselves. [III.8] Then we left the dungeon and everybody refreshed themselves. I breast-fed my son who had already lost weight from not eating. Since I was worried about him, I spoke to my mother. I also tried to comfort my brother. I asked them to take care of my son. I kept growing weaker because I saw them pining away for my sake. [III.9] I suffered such worries for several days and I insisted that my child remain in the prison with me. Immediately I regained my strength and I was

relieved of fatigue and of my worry about my child. Then all of a sudden the prison became a palace for me, so much so that I preferred to be there over anywhere else.

[IV.1] "Then my brother said to me: 'Noble sister, you already have such a great reputation that you could ask for a vision and it would be revealed to you whether we will be martyred or released.' I knew that I could discuss these things with the Lord, whose favors I had already experienced, so I promised him faithfully: 'Tomorrow I shall report to you.'

[IV.2] "I did ask and this is what I was shown: I saw a bronze ladder of great height reaching all the way up to heaven [cf. Gen. 28:12]. It was so narrow, you couldn't climb up unless you went single file. All sorts of weapons were attached to the sides of the ladder. [IV.3] There were swords, lances, hooks, daggers, and javelins, so that if someone were careless or not paying attention as they were ascending, they would be cut to pieces, and bits of their flesh would get caught on the weapons. [IV.4] There was a huge dragon lying under that same ladder. It threatened to attack those who were ascending, frightening them so they would not climb up. [IV.5] However, Saturus went up first. He was our inspiration. He had voluntarily handed himself over for our sake so he was not with us when we were arrested. [IV.6] When he came to the top of the ladder, he turned toward me and said, 'Perpetua, pull yourself together. Watch out so the dragon doesn't bite you.' I replied, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, it will not harm me.' [IV.7] It slowly stuck its head out from under the ladder as if it were afraid of me, and as if I were using its head for the first step I mounted the ladder, and I ascended [cf. Gen. 3:15].

[IV.8] "Next I saw the broad expanse of a garden and a grey-haired man sitting in the middle of it, dressed like a shepherd, a tall man milking a sheep. Standing around him were many thousands of people dressed in white. [IV.9] He raised his head and looked at me. Then he said to me: 'Welcome, child.' He called me over and gave me the cheese he milked, just about enough for a small mouthful. I took it in my cupped hands and ate it, and everyone standing around said: 'Amen.'

[IV.10] "I woke up at the sound of their voices, still tasting something sweet, which I could not identify. I immediately reported this to my brother and we understood that we would undergo martyrdom and we began to put no hope in this world.

[V.1] "After a few days the rumor went around that we would be granted a hearing. However, my father, all consumed with anxiety, arrived unexpectedly from the city. [V.2] He came up to me to persuade me saying: 'Take pity on my grey hair, daughter. Take pity on your father, if I am worthy to be called your father. Haven't I raised you up to this point in your life? Haven't I favored you over all your brothers? Don't disgrace me in front of everybody. [V.3] Consider your brothers. Consider your mother and your aunt. Consider your son who will not be able to live once you are gone. [V.4] Lay aside your pride; do not destroy all of us. None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if

you suffer any of this.' [V.5] He said these things just like a father doing the utmost of his duty, kissing my hands, and throwing himself at my feet. In his weeping he did not call me 'daughter,' but 'madam.' [V.6] I felt sorry for my father's situation because he alone of all my relatives did not rejoice in my martyrdom. I tried to comfort him saying: 'What happens on this prisoners' platform is whatever God has willed. You must realize that we are not in our own power but in God's.' This made him terribly sad so he left.

[VI.1] "The next day while we were eating breakfast, all of a sudden we were bound over for trial. We arrived at the forum and immediately the report circulated through the neighborhood of the forum and a huge crowd assembled. [VI.2] We ascended the prisoners' platform. Several people were questioned under torture and confessed. Then they came to me. My father appeared there with my son and he pulled me down the step saying: 'Offer the sacrifice. Take pity on your son.'

[VI.3] "Hilarius, the procurator who had assumed the power to enforce the death penalty, succeeding the late proconsul Minucus Timinianus, said, 'Take pity on your father's grey hair. Take pity on the tender age of your boy. [VI.4] Perform the sacrifice for the welfare of the Emperors.' I responded, 'I will not do it.' Hilarius asked: 'Are you a Christian?' I responded, 'I am a Christian.' [VI.5] When my father kept trying to pull me down, Hilarius ordered him thrown out and beaten with a rod. My father's situation made me sad, as if I myself had been beaten, and so I was upset because of his miserable old age.

[VI.6] "Then Hilarius passed sentence on all of us and he condemned us to the beasts. Then we went back to the prison full of joy. [VI.7] Since my son had gotten used to breast-feeding and to staying with me in prison, I immediately sent the deacon Pomponius to my father, asking for him. [VI.8] But my father would not hand him over. Then as God willed it, my son no longer desired my breasts nor were my breasts swollen. Consequently, I did not wither away with worry about my child or about any pain in my breasts.

[VII.1] "A few days later while we were all praying, all of a sudden in the middle of prayer, a word sprang from my lips and I spoke the name 'Dinocrates.' And I was flabbergasted because he had never entered my mind until now, and I felt sorry for him when I remembered his predicament. [VII.2] Instantly I recognized that I had a right and an obligation to pray for him. And I began to pray a lot about him and cry out to the Lord. [VII.3] Right away, that very same night, I saw this vision. [VII.4] I saw Dinocrates coming up out of a very dark place, where there were a lot of people. I saw that he was really hot and thirsty. His clothes were dirty, he was pale, and he had the wound on his face that he had when he was dying. [VII.5] This Dinocrates was my brother according to the flesh. He was seven years old and he died from a tumor on his face so that his death was disgusting to everyone. [VII.6] So I prayed about him; but there was a great gulf between him and me, so that neither one of us could come near the other [Luke 16:26]. [VII.7] There where Dinocrates was,

there was a pool full of water but its rim was taller than the boy. Dinocrates kept stretching up to drink from it. [VII.8] I was very upset because although the pool contained water, he could not drink, because the rim was too high.

[VII.9] "I woke up and I knew that my brother was suffering but I was confident that I could help him. So I prayed for him every day until we went to the military prison, for we were to fight in the military games since it was the birthday of Geta Caesar. [VII.10] I prayed for my brother day and night groaning and crying, so that my prayer might be answered.

[VIII.1] "On the day we were kept in chains I had this vision: I saw the place I had seen before, and I saw Dinocrates all cleaned up and well dressed, refreshed. Where the wound had been, I saw only a scar. [VIII.2] I saw the pool which I had seen before with its edge dropped down as low as the boy's navel. He gulped water from it continually. [VIII.3] On its rim was a golden bowl full of water. Dinocrates came up and began to drink from it, yet the bowl was never drained dry. [VIII.4] Once he was satisfied, he stopped in order to play in the water, having fun the way little children do. Then I woke up. At that point I realized that he had been relieved of his pain.

[IX.1] "Finally a few days later, Pudens, the centurion in charge of the prison, began to praise us. He realized that we had a lot of courage. He let several people in to see us so that we might comfort each other. [IX.2] However, when the day of the games approached, my father came to me consumed with weariness and he began to tear out the hair from his beard and to throw the hairs on the ground. He cursed his years and said such things as would move all creation. [IX.3] I felt sorry for his unhappy old age.

[X.1] "The day before we were to fight the beasts, I had a vision in which Pomponius the deacon came to the prison gate and was knocking hard. [X.2] I went out and opened up for him. He was dressed in white and wore fancy sandals. [X.3] And he said to me, 'Perpetua, we are waiting for you. Come on.' He held my hand, and we began to go through rough and tortuous places. [X.4] When we finally arrived all out of breath at the amphitheater, he led me into the middle of the arena, and said to me, 'Don't be afraid: I am here with you and fighting alongside you.' Then he left.

[X.5] "Next I saw a huge crowd of bewildered people. I could not understand why no beasts had been let loose against me, since I knew that I had been condemned to fight the beasts. [X.6] However, a particular Egyptian, a really ugly one, came out against me, with his seconds, to fight with me. Good-looking young men came toward me, my seconds, and my cheering section. [X.7] I was stripped and I had become a man! My trainers began to rub me down with oil, as they do in competition. I saw the Egyptian on the other side rolling in the dust.

[X.8] "Then some man came out, so wondrously tall that he was even taller than the top row of the amphitheater. He was wearing a tunic without a belt and it was purple on the center of his chest with white stripes on both sides. He was wearing fancy sandals made of silver and gold. He carried a rod, like a

person who trains gladiators, and a green branch with golden apples on it. [X.9] He called for silence and said, 'If the Egyptian wins, he will kill her with the sword; if she wins, she will receive this branch.' Then he stepped back.

[X.10] "Next we approached each other and began to throw a few jabs. He tried to grab my feet, but I bashed his face with my heels. Then I was lifted up into the air and I began to attack him but it was like my feet were not touching the ground. [X.11] When I noticed his delaying tactics, I put my hands together so I could intertwine my fingers, and I caught his head between my hands. He fell on his face and I stepped on his head [cf. Gen. 3:15]. [X.12] The people began to shout and my trainers began to sing. I stepped up to the trainer and accepted the branch. [X.13] He kissed me and said to me: 'Peace be with you, daughter.' And I began to proceed in triumph to the gate of the victors.

[X.14] "Then I woke up and I realized that I would not have to fight against the beasts but against the devil, and I knew that victory was mine. [X.15] I have written what happened up to the day before the games. Anyone who wishes to write about what happened on that day should do so."

[XI.1] The blessed Saturus also related his vision, which he himself wrote down. [XI.2] He said: "As we were suffering, we left our bodies, and we began to be carried eastward by four angels whose hands did not touch us. [XI.3] However, we were proceeding not backward but turned face forward as if we were going up a gradual slope. [XI.4] When we were freed from this world, we saw an intense light, and since Perpetua was there at my side, I said to her, 'This is what the Lord promised us. Now we understand the promise.'

[XI.5] "While we were being carried by the four angels, there appeared to us a broad expanse, which was something like a garden. It had rose trees and all kinds of flowers. [XI.6] The trees were as tall as cypresses, and their leaves were falling all the time. [XI.7] In the garden were four more angels even more glorious than the others. When they saw us, they greeted us with respect and they said to the other angels with admiration, 'They're here, they're here.' The four angels who were carrying us began to tremble and they put us down. [XI.8] We crossed an open expanse on our own by a broad pathway. [XI.9] Here we came upon Jocundus and Saturninus and Artaxius who had been burnt alive in the same persecution, and Quintus who had already died a martyr in prison and we asked them where the others were. [XI.10] But the angels said to us: 'Step right up. Come in and greet the Lord.'

[XII.1] "We approached a place where the walls looked like they were made of light. Four angels stood in front of the entrance to this place, and dressed those who were entering in white stoles. [XII.2] We went in and we heard one united voice saying: 'Holy, holy, holy' without ceasing (Isa. 6:3). Then we saw someone sitting there who looked like an old man. He had grey hair but a youthful face. We could not see his feet. [XII.4] At his right and left were four elders and behind them stood several other elders. [XII.5] We went in and stood in amazement before the throne. Four angels lifted us up, and we kissed him, and he stroked our faces with his hand. [XII.6] The other elders said to

us: 'Let us stand.' So we stood up and gave the kiss of peace. Then the elders said to us, 'Go and play.' [XII.7] And I said to Perpetua, 'You have your wish.' And she said to me, 'Thanks be to God. However happy I was in the flesh, I am happier here and now.'

[XIII.1] "Then we went out and outside the gates I saw Optatus, the bishop, on the right and Aspasius, the presbyter and teacher, on the left, separated from one another and sad. [XIII.2] They threw themselves at our feet, and they said: 'Make peace between us because you died and left us this way.' [XIII.3] We said to them; 'Aren't you our bishop, and you our presbyter? How can you throw yourselves at our feet?' We were moved and we embraced them. [XIII.4] Then Perpetua began to speak to them in Greek, and we took them over to one side in the garden under a rose tree. [XIII.5] While we were speaking with them, the angels said to them, 'Let them relax. If you have disagreements between you, forgive each other.' [XIII.6] This upset Optatus and Aspasius. Next the angels said to Optatus, 'Correct your people, because they come to you just like they're coming back from the circus fighting about their favorite teams.' [XIII.7] It seemed to us that the angels wanted to close the gates. [XIII.8] But then we began to recognize many brothers and sisters, even some martyrs. We all felt as if we were nourished by an indescribable scent, which satisfied us. Then I woke up filled with joy."

[XIV.1] These are the remarkable visions of the blessed martyrs Saturus and Perpetua, which they themselves have written. [XIV.2] God called Secundulus to a speedy departure from the world while he was in prison, so that by God's grace he might not have to fight the beasts. [XIV.3] Nevertheless even if he did not experience the sword in his spirit, he at least knew it in the flesh.

[XV.1] About Felicity now, the grace of the Lord touched her in this way. [XV.2] She was already pregnant when she was arrested. She was now in her eighth month. As the day of the exhibition games approached, she was terribly distressed that she might be separated from us on account of her pregnancy, since pregnant women were not allowed to be executed. She was afraid that she might have to pour out her holy and innocent blood at a later date along with criminals. [XV.3] Her co-martyrs were terribly saddened that they might have to leave such a good companion as their associate there alone on the road to her hope.

[XV.4] Therefore, two days before the games they poured out their prayer to the Lord with a single united cry. [XV.5] Immediately after their prayer, her labor pains arrived. While she was in labor she was in great pain due to the natural difficulty of a birth in the eighth month. One of the prison guards said to her, "You're crying now. What will you do when you are thrown to the beasts, whom you scorned when you didn't want to sacrifice?" [XV.6] She responded, "What I suffer now, I suffer; but there will be someone within me who will suffer for me because I will be suffering for him." [XV.7] She gave birth to a girl and one of the sisters brought her up as her own daughter.

[XVI.1] Therefore, the Holy Spirit permitted and by permitting willed that

the order of events at the games be written down. Even if we are unworthy to add anything to such a glorious account, nevertheless, we carry out our charge as if it were a command from the most holy Perpetua. Thus we add one more proof of her constancy and the sublimity of her soul.

[XVI.2] The tribune treated the prisoners most severely. Because of warnings from deluded persons he feared that they might contrive to escape through some magical incantations; Perpetua responded to this directly, [XVI.3] "Why don't you even let us refresh ourselves since we are the most distinguished of your criminals? After all, we are the ones who are going to fight on Caesar's birthday. Or wouldn't it be to your credit if we were brought out to him all spruced up?" [XVI.4] The tribune bristled at this and then blushed. Later he ordered that they be treated more humanely. Consequently, permission was given for the brothers and sisters and for others to come in and comfort them. At that time the centurion in charge of the prison was a believer.

[XVII.1] The day before the games the prisoners were having their last meal which they call a *libera* or free meal. But they ate not a free meal but an agape or love feast.

They sent word to the public with the same firm perseverance, warning of the judgment of God, witnessing to their happiness about their martyrdom, joking about the curiosity of the bystanders. Saturus said, [XVII.2] "Won't tomorrow be enough for you? Why do you stare so eagerly at those you hate? Friends today, enemies tomorrow. Nevertheless, notice our faces well, so that you will recognize us on that day." [XVII.3] So the people all went away bewildered and many of them came to believe.

[XVIII.1] The day of their victory dawned. They filed out of the prison into the amphitheater as if into heaven, joyful, their faces radiant, trembling with joy not fear. [XVIII.2] Perpetua was following them with shining face and peaceful pace, like a bride of Christ, the delight of God, strong enough to stare down all the spectators. Felicity was there too, rejoicing that by giving birth she had been freed so she could fight the beasts. [XVIII.3] She could go from one kind of bleeding to another, from the midwife to the games, ready to be washed after childbirth by a second baptism.

[XVIII.4] When they had been led out through the gate, they were forced to put on costumes. The men were decked out like priests of Saturn and the women as those dedicated to Ceres. But noble perseverance fought back even to the last minute. [XVIII.5] Perpetua said, "Now we came here of our own will, so our freedom might not be constrained. We were ready to forfeit our lives so that we would not have to do anything like this. You agreed with us on this." [XVIII.6] Even Injustice recognized justice. So the tribune relented and they were led in just as they were.

[XVIII.7] Perpetua was singing as if she were already stepping on the head of the Egyptian. Revocatus and Saturninus and Saturus started to reproach the spectators. [XVIII.8] Then when they came before Hilarianus, they began to say to him through their gestures and nodding, "What you do to us, God will

do to you." [XVIII.9] In response the people became infuriated and they demanded that they be scourged in front of a line of gladiators who usually fought with animals. Revocatus and Saturninus and Saturus gave thanks to God that they might imitate the passion of the Lord at least in this way.

[XIX.1] But the One who said, "Ask and you shall receive," gave to those who asked the death each one desired. [XIX.2] For when they were discussing among themselves their desire for martyrdom, Saturninus specifically confessed that he wished to be thrown to all the beasts, so that he might wear an exceptionally glorious crown. [XIX.3] Therefore, at the start of the spectacle, he and Revocatus contended with a leopard and then they were set on a platform and maimed by a bear. [XIX.4] However, Saturus dreaded nothing more than the bear. He had anticipated being dispatched by a single bite of the leopard. [XIX.5] Then he was paired up with a boar. He was not gored by it, but rather the gladiator who had tied him to the boar was gouged by the same beast and died a couple of days after the games. Saturus was only dragged around. [XIX.6] When he was tied to a bridge for the bear, the bear didn't want to come out of its cage. So Saturus was called back to the sidelines unharmed one more time.

[XX.1] However, the devil prepared a most ferocious cow for the young women. It was not an animal usually employed in the games but it was intended to match their sex. [XX.2] They were brought out, stripped naked, and covered with nets. The people recoiled at seeing the one delicate young woman, and the other immediately post partum with milk still leaking from her breasts. [XX.3] So they were called back and carelessly dressed. [XX.4] First Perpetua was tossed by the cow and fell on her hip. When she sat up, she pulled her torn tunic from her side to cover her thigh, thinking more of her modesty than of her pain. [XX.5] After looking for her hair pin, she pinned up her disheveled hair. It was not appropriate that the martyr suffer with her hair disheveled. She wouldn't want to look like she was in mourning in the hour of her glory. [XX.6] When she got up and she saw Felicity thrown to the ground, she went over to her, gave her a hand and pulled her to her feet. [XX.7] Both of them stood together. The insensitivity of the people was finally exhausted and the women were recalled through the gate of victors.

[XX.8] There Perpetua was taken care of by a man by the name of Rusticus who was then a catechumen. He stayed close to her. Then she woke up as if she had been dreaming—she was actually caught up in the Spirit and in ecstasy. She began to look around and to the astonishment of all she asked, "When are we going to be brought out to fight this cow or whatever it is?" [XX.9] When she had heard what had just happened, at first she did not believe it until she recognized the marks of torture on her body and on her clothing. [XX.10] She called for her brother and the catechumen and said to them, "Stand firm in faith. Love one another, all of you, and do not be tempted to give up because of our suffering" [Acts 14:22].

[XXI.1] Meanwhile at another gate Saturus was trying to convert the soldier

Pudens. He said, "Up to this point, it has been just as I imagined and predicted. As yet no beast has hurt me. Now believe with your whole heart. I am going out there and I am going to be devoured by the leopard in one bite."

[XXI.2] Then just as the spectacle was ending the leopard was let loose and in one bite Saturus was covered with blood, so that as he was being brought back the people cried out to him a testimony to his second baptism, "Well washed, well washed." [XXI.3] For surely anyone who was washed that way was saved. [XXI.4] Then he said to Pudens the soldier, "Goodbye and remember the faith. Don't let these things upset you, but let them strengthen you." [XXI.5] At the same time he asked Pudens for the little ring from his finger. He dipped it in the blood of his own wound and gave it to him as a keepsake. He left him a token, a memento of his death. [XXI.6] After that he fell lifeless and was thrown in the usual place for people who were going to have their throats slit. [XXI.7] Then the people called for the others to be brought into the center of the arena, so that through their own eyes the spectators might be accessories in their murder as the sword penetrated the bodies of the martyrs. So the martyrs all got up and on their own went to the place the people wanted them to go. But first they kissed each other so they might bring their martyrdom to completion with the kiss of peace. [XXI.8] Some including Saturus were decapitated calmly and in silence. He had gone up the ladder first and now he gave up his spirit first. He was the one who encouraged Perpetua. [XXI.9] However, Perpetua had to experience more pain and she cried out when she was pierced between the collar bones, and she herself guided the faltering right hand of the novice gladiator to her throat. [XXI.10] Perhaps such a woman, one feared by an impure world, could not be killed in any other way than the way she herself wished to be.

[XXI.11] O bravest and most blessed martyrs, truly called and chosen for the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ! Anyone who exalts, honors, and adores that glory should read these illustrations no less than those of the past for the edification of the Church. In that way new examples of virtue will effectively bear witness to the same Holy Spirit and God, the almighty Father and his son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and boundless power for ever and ever. Amen.