

September 2010

A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 200-300



Diocesan Mission Statement

"We the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Scranton, in union with our Holy Father, the Pope, are called through baptism to share in the mission which Jesus Christ has entrusted to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Priests, deacons, religious and laity, under the leadership of our Bishop, cooperate to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the teaching of the Church to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, for the salvation of all, and to witness by grace to the Kingdom of God so as to promote a culture of life, justice and peace."

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Key Events: A.D. 200-300

203: Saints Perpetua and Felicity are martyred in the arena at Carthage.

215: Origen (b. 185) begins writing. A theologian and biblical scholar, Origen's father was martyred for his Christian faith in 202. Origen was the head of a widely respected catechetical school in Alexandria and, later, in Caesarea. Some of his theological hypotheses were rejected by the Church, but he was and is respected as one of the greatest theologians of the early centuries.

250: The Edict of Decius orders the first empire-wide persecution of Christians (previous persecu-

tions were confined to specific areas, such as Rome). The emperor Decius believed that the survival of the roman empire depended on faithfulness to the pagan gods, thus he sought to completely eliminate Christianity. At the time roughly a third of the empire was Christian.

253: Emperor Valerian comes to power and will reign until 260. During that time he issued two rescripts (responses to questions posed to him by a subordinate). The first (A.D. 257) prevented Christians from meeting in public places and celebrating the Eucharist in the catacombs (underground burial chambers).

The second (A.D. 258) ordered that bishops, priests, and deacons were to be immediately executed, while Christians of rank were to be removed from their offices and (often) sold into slavery.

258: During the time of Valerian's second rescript, Pope St. Sixtus II was arrested while celebrating Mass with seven deacons. St. Sixtus and six of the deacons were immediately beheaded. The seventh deacon, St. Lawrence, was told to fetch the Church's treasure.. When he brought the city's poor and presented them as the Church's "treasure" he was roasted alive.

Key Concept: Martyrdom

The term "martyr" comes from the Greek for "bearing witness." Hence, in Church history when we talk about someone being a martyr we are saying that they "bore witness" to their faith in Jesus Christ.

Generally speaking, someone is considered a martyr if their "bearing witness" led to them being killed for their faith (this

kind of martyrdom is sometimes called "red" or "wet" martyrdom.). St. Stephen, for example, was stoned to death for boldly proclaiming his faith in Christ and is considered the first Christian martyr (Acts 6:8-7:60). However, the Church recognizes that not everyone who bears witness will be required to forfeit their life (most of you reading this, for example).

Those Christians who bear witness to their faith in Christ without giving up their life still experience suffering at the hands of those who don't believe, but their suffering is more emotional than physical (though physical martyrdom still occurs throughout the world). When someone refers to "white" or "dry" martyrdom, they are referring to this type of suffering for the Gospel.



Sts. Perpetua and Felicity were martyred during the persecution of Emperor Septimus Severus.

“I understood that I should fight, not with beasts but against the devil; but I knew that mine was the victory.”



Sts. Perpetua and Felicity were thrown in an arena to be attacked by an enraged cow.

Get to Know: Sts. Perpetua and Felicity (d. A.D. 203)

St. Perpetua was a noblewoman who was drawn to faith in Jesus. The desire to learn more about Him led her to seek religious instruction not only for herself, but her entire household. One of the members of her household was a slave named Felicity, who shared her mistress's love for Christ.

Roman officials eventually learned of these catechetical gatherings and imprisoned all of the participants, including Perpetua and Felicity who were forced to raise their children in prison. Overcome with grief, Perpetua's family—especially her father, who was a governor in Carthage—pleaded with her in an attempt to get her

to renounce Christ so she could live. Pointing to a water jug, she asked her father, "See that pot lying there? Can you call it by any other name than what it is?" Her father answered, "Of course not." Perpetua responded, "Neither can I call myself by any other name than what I am ~ a Christian."

During their imprisonment Felicity gave birth to a daughter. While in the midst of her labor pains a guard teased her that she would soon experience something even more painful. Felicity responded that, while she was bearing the birthing pain on her own, when she was executed Jesus Himself would bear her suffering.

In the year 203, during the persecution of Emperor Septimus Severus, Perpetua and Felicity were martyred along with all their companions in the arena at Carthage. The saints were scourged before being attacked by wild animals such as leopards, bears, and wild boars which were provoked and worked into a frenzy on such occasions by their Roman keepers.

Sts. Perpetua and Felicity share the same feast day in the Church's calendar: March 7.

In Their Own Words: St. Perpetua's Account of Her Imprisonment

"The day before we fought, I saw in a vision that Pomponius the deacon had come hither to the door of the prison, and knocked hard upon it. And I went out to him and opened to him; he was clothed in a white robe ungirdled, having shoes curiously wrought. And he said to me: Perpetua, we await you; come. And he took my hand, and we began to go through rugged and winding places. At last with much breathing hard we came to the amphitheatre, and he led me into the midst of the arena. And he said to me: Be not afraid; I am here with you and labor together with you. And he went away. And I saw much people watching closely. And because I knew that I was condemned to the beasts I marvelled that beasts were not sent out against me. And there came out against me a certain ill-favored Egyptian with his helpers, to fight with me. Also there came to me comely young men, my helpers and

aiders. And I was stripped naked, and I became a man. And my helpers began to rub me with oil as their custom is for a contest; and over against me saw that Egyptian wallowing in the dust. And there came forth a man of very great stature, so that he overpassed the very top of the amphitheatre, wearing a robe ungirdled, and beneath it between the two stripes over the breast a robe of purple; having also shoes curiously wrought in gold and silver; bearing a rod like a master of gladiators, and a green branch whereon were golden apples. And he besought silence and said: The Egyptian, if shall conquer this woman, shall slay her with the sword; and if she shall conquer him, she shall receive this branch. And he went away. And we came nigh to each other, and began to buffet one another. He tried to trip up my feet, but I with my heels smote upon his face. And I rose up into the air and began so to smite

him as though I trod not the earth. But when I saw that there was yet delay, I joined my hands, setting finger against finger of them. And I caught his head, and he fell upon his face; and I trod upon his head. And the people began to shout, and my helpers began to sing. And I went up to the master of gladiators and received the branch. And he kissed me and said to me: Daughter, peace be with you. And I began to go with glory to the gate called the Gate of Life.

And I awoke; and I understood that I should fight, not with beasts but against the devil; but I knew that mine was the victory.

Thus far I have written this, till the day before the games; but the deed of the games tehmsleves let him write who will. "