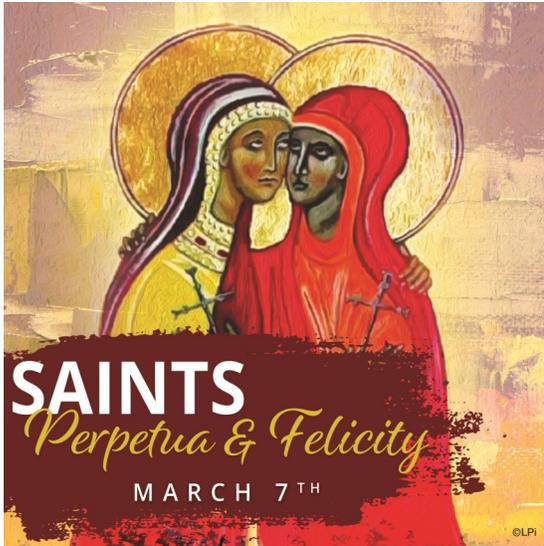


FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we journey together through this holy season of Lent, a time of conversion and renewal, the Church places before us the luminous feast of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity on March 7. These valiant martyrs, who shed their blood in the arena of Carthage around the year 203, were not distant heroes of a bygone era but living icons of the faith we are called to embrace today. Perpetua, a noblewoman of 22, recently baptized and nursing her infant son, and Felicity, her humble slave, pregnant and enduring the throes of childbirth in prison, stood firm against the idols of empire and family. Their story, preserved in Perpetua's own diary, a rare and precious testimony, resounds with the voice of the Spirit, much like the Acts of the Apostles, where the early Church faced persecution yet proclaimed, "We must obey God rather than men."

In the midst of their trials, these women experienced profound visions from the Lord, echoing the dreams of Joseph in Genesis or the revelations to Daniel amid the lions' den. Perpetua saw a ladder reaching to Heaven, guarded by a dragon, with weapons along the sides, a vivid image of the narrow way Jesus speaks of: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Climbing that ladder, she reached a garden where the Good Shepherd tended his flock, reminding us of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters." Even in the shadow of death, they found refreshment in Christ's promise: "I am the living water," quenching the thirst of their souls as they prepared for the ultimate witness.

Felicity's story pierces the heart with its raw humanity and divine grace. Imprisoned and heavy with child, she prayed fervently that her delivery might come before the games, lest she be left behind while her companions faced the beasts. When labor came upon her prematurely, amid mocking guards who taunted her about the pains of the arena, she replied with prophetic wisdom: "Now it is I who suffer what I suffer; but then another will be inside me who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for him." Oh, brothers and sisters, what an echo of Saint Paul's words in Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me!" This is the mystery of our baptism: a dying to self, a burial with Christ in the waters, so that we might rise to new life. Felicity gave birth to a daughter, entrusted to the community, and then joined Perpetua in the amphitheater, their white garments of baptism stained red with the blood of the Lamb.

Supported by their catechist, Saturus, and fellow prisoners, these saints formed a small ecclesia in chains. Do we not hear the Lord's call in their example? Are we allowing the light of Christ to expose our darkness, as in John's Gospel? "The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." Like Perpetua who renounced her father's pleas to recant, echoing Jesus' words, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," we are invited to let go of our idols: wealth, comfort, and approval. The psalmist cries out, "You are my God; my happiness lies in you alone." We can learn to sing this truth in our parish, our songs rising like incense before the throne.

In a world that still worships false gods: power, pleasure, and possessions, these martyrs challenge us to live as a "sign of contradiction," bearing witness not necessarily through bloody martyrdom, but through the white martyrdom of daily fidelity. Think of the struggles in our families, the temptations at work, the scorn of a secular society: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." Have we allowed the Word to penetrate our hearts, as it did for Perpetua and Felicity, transforming fear into joy?

Peace,