

if our minds be there', he promises, 'we shall be in peace here'.

'To see God', says St Augustine, 'thou must be made clean . . . "blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God".' (Sermon 2.) Again, in Sermon 3 he says, 'Let everyone that is faithful, having received so much, learn to hope, and hold the goodness of God in the past and present as a pledge for what is yet to come'.

Perhaps one of the loveliest passages ever penned on the Ascension is St Gregory's Homily 29: 'Behold he comes, leaping and skipping upon the hills. In coming to redeem us, he did indeed, as it were, make leaps—from heaven to the womb, from the womb to the manger, from the manger to the cross, from the cross to the sepulchre, from the sepulchre back to heaven; to incite us to follow him, the Truth made leaps for our sake, he rejoiced as a giant to run his way, that from our hearts we may say to him, "Draw us, and we will run after thee, in the odour of thy ointments"'. It behoves us to follow him thither in our hearts, where we believe him to have ascended in body. Let nothing below delight us . . . since we have a Father in heaven.'

On this day, says the liturgy, he set our frailty on the right hand of God! Small wonder that our Lord in one of the responses of matins tells us: 'Let not your heart be troubled: I go to the Father . . . and I will send you, Alleluia, the Spirit of truth, and your heart shall rejoice, Alleluia!'

And after such a promise, how could we not, as holy Church prays, 'live in mind of heavenly things'?



THE PASSION OF THE HOLY MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY: I

(Translated by H. O'D.)

SS Perpetua and Felicity and their companions were martyred about A.D. 202, probably at Carthage. Their Acta include a kind of diary kept by Perpetua, and an account of a vision by Saturus, also one of the group, both written in a very direct and unliterary way, in considerable contrast with the rather fulsome style of the narrator, usually thought to be Tertullian.

HISTORIC examples of steadfast faith are collected and put in writing, because they bear witness to the power of God's grace, and help to inspire men; when read they come before us again, as it were, so that God shall be honoured

and men given strength. Surely similar accounts from our own times ought to be circulated, as being just as useful for both these purposes? At some future date these contemporary examples will themselves be respectably historic, and thus of use to coming generations; even though at present they carry less weight, because what is past is considered more hallowed than what is new. But we believe that the power of the Holy Spirit is one and the same, whatever the period of history; and so we should be more impressed with all the latest occurrences, for these are nearer to the very last things of all, and grace will be ever more lavishly given as history draws towards its destined conclusion. *And it shall come to pass, in the last days (saith the Lord), I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy: and your young men shall see visions; and your old men shall dream dreams.*

So we acknowledge and revere contemporary visions, just as we do the prophecies, for they have equally been promised to us. Indeed, we make use of all the other manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the service of the Church, because it is to her that the same Spirit was sent, administering all gifts to all men, just as the Lord distributed to each one. How necessary, then, that we should keep records of such visions, and also make God's glory widely known by reading them. Otherwise the weak-minded or the weak in faith might be led to suppose that it was only to our forefathers that God's grace was given, to raise up martyrs and vouchsafe revelations. Yet God always performs what he promised to, giving testimony to those who do not believe and supporting those who do.

And so we too, brethren and dear children, tell you what we have heard and handled; so that those of you who were present there may be reminded of the glory of the Lord, and those who only hear about these events may now have fellowship with the holy martyrs—and through them with the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.

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A group of young catechumens was arrested—Revocatus, and Felicity his fellow-slave, and Saturninus and Secundulus. Also among them was Vivia Perpetua, a young married woman from a good family, well brought up, whose mother and father were still living. She was about twenty-two. She had two brothers, one of whom was a catechumen like herself, and a baby son,

whom she was still feeding. We can let her give the whole account of her martyrdom, just as she left it herself.

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We were still under house-arrest, and Father because of his affection for me would keep on trying to make me turn aside and drop it all, so 'Father', I say, 'just to show what I mean, you see that bit of crockery over there, it's a jug or something, isn't it?' So he said, 'Yes, I see'. So I said to him, 'You couldn't call it something different from what it is, could you?' And he says, 'No'.

'Well, I can't call myself something different from what I am either, & that's a Christian.'

Father was *furios* at this & flew at me as if he wanted to scratch my eyes out, but all he could do was give me a shaking & off he went, foiled & the devil's arguments with him. Then for a few days Father wasn't around & I thanked God & made the most of his absence. It was during those few days that we were baptized—the Holy Ghost told me, though, that all I should ask for from the waters of baptism was strength to put up with everything.

*

A few days later we were taken to prison, & I was absolutely horrified as I'd never been anywhere so dark. What a dreadful day! The stifling heat from the crowds & the soldiers so rough & on top of it all, me worried to death about the baby.

Then those kind deacons Tertius & Pomponius who were looking after us did a bit of bribing to get us let into a better part of the prison for a few hours' peace. So we went out of the dungeon & everyone relaxed. I fed the baby which was nearly dying of hunger by this time. I was worried about him, so I talked things over with Mother & cheered up my brother & said they should look after the baby. It made me awfully miserable seeing them being so miserable about me.

I was all het up about this for several days, & so I managed to arrange to keep the baby with me in prison, & then all at once I was quite alright & stopped being worried & nervy about him & all of a sudden the prison turned into a palace for me, so that there wasn't anywhere else I'd rather have been.

*

The next thing was that my brother said to me, 'Perpetua, you can get great favours now, so why not ask for a Vision &

find out whether you're going to be martyred or whether you'll get off?' And knowing that I talked with Our Lord a good deal & had lots of kindnesses from Him, I promised him quite faithfully that I would & I said 'I'll tell you all about it tomorrow'. So I asked, & this is what was shown me.

I saw a golden ladder, terribly high, reaching up all the way to Heaven, & very narrow, so that you could only go up one at a time, & there were all sorts of iron things fixed to its sides. There were swords & spears & hooks & daggers there, so that if anyone climbed up carelessly or without looking where he was going he'd get cut to pieces on all those sharp edges. And right underneath the ladder crouched an absolutely enormous Dragon lying in wait for people wanting to climb the ladder & frightening them so that they wouldn't.

The first to go up was Saturus, who had been the cause of our conversion & who'd given himself up for our sakes, quite off his own bat as he hadn't been there when we were arrested, & he got to the top of the ladder & turned round & said, 'Perpetua, I'm helping you, but watch out that Dragon doesn't get hold of you'. And I said, 'It won't hurt me, IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST'. And it put its head out from underneath the ladder, slowly as if it was afraid of me, & I trod on its head just as I would have trodden on the bottom rung.

And I climbed up & found an enormous garden & a Man with golden hair sitting in the middle dressed up like a shepherd, quite magnificent, milking His sheep, & thousands of people all in white standing round Him. And He looked up & saw me & said, 'Well done, dear child', & He called me over & gave me about a mouthful of the cheese He'd made from the milk & I took it in my cupped hands & ate it & all the people standing round said, 'AMEN'. And with the noise I woke up, still tasting something sweet, what I don't know.

And I told it all to my brother at the first opportunity & we realized that this meant martyrdom & from now on we didn't have any more hope in *this* world.

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A few days later a rumour went round that we were going to be tried. And now my father suddenly arrived from the city, worn out & depressed, & made his way in to me to break my determination, saying, 'My child, take pity on my old age, take

pity on your father—if I've still any right to be called Father by you. Aren't these the hands that have guided you to this flower of your youth? Haven't I loved you more than your brothers? So do not lay me open to men's reproaches. Think of your brothers, think of your mother & your aunt, think of your little boy—how can he hope to survive you? Change your mind, or you'll be the death of us all. None of us will ever be able to hold up our heads in public again if anything happens to you.' Father was saying all this with real feeling, kissing my hands & throwing himself at my feet, speaking to me in tears with great deference. And I felt very sorry for my old father as he'd be the only one out of all my family who couldn't welcome my martyrdom, & I cheered him up, saying, 'Whatever happens in that court must be what God wants. For, you know, we're not in our own power but in God's.' And he was very sad going away.

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Another day just when we were having dinner we were suddenly whisked away to be tried, & came to the Forum. The report got round quickly to all the places round the Forum & soon there was a real crowd there. We got up into the box. When the others were questioned they confessed. Then it was my turn, & that very moment Father arrived there carrying the baby & hauled me down from the step & said beseechingly, 'Have mercy on the babe'. And the Procurator, Hilarian, who had just been made judge in place of Minucius Timinian who had died, said, 'Spare your father's old head, spare the young child. Offer sacrifice for the well-being of the Emperors.' And I replied, 'I won't'. Hilarian said, 'Are you a Christian?' And I answered, 'Yes, I am a Christian'. And as Father held his ground to try & make me give in Hilarian ordered him to be turned out & birched. And I really was just as sorry about Father's plight as if I'd been beaten myself—I felt terrible about him, having such a time in his old age. Then he passed judgment on us all & condemned us to the wild animals & in high spirits we went back to the prison. Then as the baby was used to being breast-fed by me & staying with me in prison, as soon as we got there I sent Pomponius the deacon to Father to ask for the baby. But he wouldn't hand him over. But now he's stopped wanting the breast & I haven't any more pain there either, all God's doing so

that I wouldn't be tormented with worry about the baby & the pain in my breasts both together.

*

A few days later while we were all praying, suddenly in the middle of my prayers I spoke something out loud & said, 'Dinocrates', & I was astounded as the thought of him hadn't even crossed my mind till then, & I got very sad remembering what had happened to him. And then at once I realized I could get many favours & ought to do what I could for him. And I began to pray very hard for him, pleading with Our Lord. And immediately, that very night, I was shown this in a Vision.

I saw Dinocrates coming out of somewhere dark where there were a lot of other people too, all hot & thirsty, filthy-looking & very pale & his face disfigured as it was when he died. This Dinocrates was a brother of mine, seven years old when he got sick & died with an ulcer on his face, so that his death was a horrible experience for everyone. So I prayed about this, & between him & me was a great gulf so that we couldn't reach each other. Now there was a pool of water in the place where Dinocrates was, but its sides were higher than he was & Dinocrates was standing on tiptoe as if he wanted to have a drink. I was heartbroken that he couldn't get a drink even though there was water in the pool because the sides were so high. And I woke up & realized that my brother was in torment.

But I trusted in the prayers I was going to say for his suffering & I prayed for him every day until we moved into the arena-prison—we were going to fight in the gladiator-show in the arena. That was for Gaeta Caesar's birthday, & I prayed for Dinocrates day & night, weeping & groaning away so that my prayers would be answered.

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But the day we were actually chained up I was shown this.

I see that place, which was dark the other time I saw it, now all bright, & Dinocrates is very happy there, clean & nicely dressed. And where the sore was now I can see just a scar, & the pool I saw the other time has its sides lowered so that it only comes up to the boy's middle. And there was water flowing into it all the time & there was a golden cup full of water on the side & Dinocrates came up & started drinking out of it & the cup never got empty. And when he'd had enough he went away from the

pool & started romping round happily as children do. And I woke up.

Then I understood that he'd been released from his punishment.

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Then after a few days Pudens, the army officer who was Governor of the prison, seeing the great power of God in us, began to think very highly of us & let lots of the brethren come & see us so that we could be a comfort to one another. But when the day for the Show was getting near Father came in to see me, worn out & depressed, & started tearing at his beard & throwing himself on the ground & then flat on his face & pleading about how old he was & saying all sorts of things, enough to move heaven & earth. I was heart-broken that he was so miserable in his old age.

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The day before we were due to fight I saw Pomponius the deacon in a Vision coming here to the gate of the prison & knocking very hard. And I went out to him & opened the gate for him & he was wearing a flowing white robe & decorated sandals. And he said to me, 'Come on, Perpetua, I'm waiting for you'. And he took me by the hand & we started going through rough & winding places. Eventually after a lot of difficulty we arrived at the amphitheatre & he brought me into the middle of the arena & said to me, 'Don't be frightened, I'm here with you helping you', & disappeared. I found a huge crowd, wild with excitement. And as I knew I'd been given over to the beasts I couldn't make out why the beasts weren't let out at me. And in the opposite corner a horrible-looking Egyptian came out with his seconds to fight against me. And some very nice-looking young men came to be my seconds & supporters, & I was stripped & turned into a man. And my seconds started to rub me with oil as they usually do for a fight, & I see the Egyptian in the far corner rolling himself in the sand. And an absolutely gigantic Man came out, so tall that He was bigger than the top of the amphitheatre, wearing a flowing tunic with a purple sash across His chest with two stripes on it, & sandals decorated with gold & silver, & carrying the kind of staff trainers have & a green branch with golden apples on it. And He called for silence & said, 'If this Egyptian beats this woman he can kill her with his sword, & if she wins she'll get this branch'. And He withdrew. And we

came to the middle & started laying into each other. He tried to get hold of my feet but I stamped on his face & jumped up in the air & started to kick him as if I was tramping on the ground. But when I saw this was taking too long I joined my hands & locked my fingers together & grabbed hold of his head & he fell flat on his face & I squashed his head. And the people started cheering & my seconds burst into song. And I went up to the Trainer & got the branch. And He kissed me & said, 'Peace be with you, my child'. And to great applause I started to go out through the Victors' gate. And I woke up & realized it wasn't the beasts I'd be fighting but the Devil, but I also knew that Victory was near at hand for me.

This is what I've written up to the day before the Show. What happens at the actual Show someone else can write, if they want to.

(To be concluded)



GAMALIEL

(Questions should be addressed to Gamaliel, c/o the Editor, THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs.)

Q. Is it open to a Catholic to hold that 'the brothers of Jesus' were sons of St Joseph by a former marriage?

E.C.H.

A. This opinion certainly has an ancient and respectable ancestry. It was held in the fourth century by St Epiphanius, St Hilary, and others; it was mentioned by St Augustine as a possible explanation of the phrase. But it was rejected with characteristic brusqueness by St Jerome as 'apocryphal raving', since its earliest occurrence is in the apocryphal gospel of James. He maintained that 'the brothers of Jesus' were his cousins.

Both suggestions were made with the same idea, namely of defending the perpetual virginity of our Lady, by showing that 'the brothers of Jesus' need not have been sons of hers. Quite apart from the dogmatic teaching of the Church, it does violence to the gospel narratives to suppose that they were. In the first place, it is unthinkable in the social context of that place and time that younger brothers should have behaved towards the first-