



*Women
Speak of
God*

Lesson 2: Perpetua – Rebellious Daughter

Dear friends,

The first story we will read is a dramatic account of an early Christian who lived in Carthage in North Africa, around 203 CE. Though not even baptized yet, Perpetua is arrested along with other catechumens (those studying for church membership), taken into custody, imprisoned, tried, and ultimately put to death.

This story gives us a window into our Christian family during this early time. Her story shows the collision of Christian faith with national loyalty. For early Christians, there was no confusion of church and state. Early Christians claimed allegiance to a God that was higher than Caesar and the gods of Rome. Their nation, the Roman Empire, believed these Christians were a threat to the traditional values of Rome. Christians' refusal to worship Caesar and the gods of Rome was considered disrespectful and unpatriotic. For more on early Christianity in North Africa, see <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/burns/chroma/index.html> and <http://www.bethel.edu/~letnie/AfricanChristianity/WesternNorthAfricaHomepage.html>.

Christians have always struggled with competing loyalties. On the one hand, we all are citizens of a particular nation. Whether we are American, Korean, Mexican or another nationality, as citizens, we grow up formed in our national identity, learning the expectations, values and allegiances that constitute that national identity. Our national identity can be complex: I might identify myself proudly as an American, even while disagreeing with particular policies or programs of my government. Being the citizen of a nation can be a source of deep pride and can also be a source of deep sorrow. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., offers an example of a deeply committed American who disagreed with laws that, in light of his Christian faith, he determined were unjust. In presidential and other political campaigns we hear calls to be American and patriotic, but different voices offer different content to our expressions of patriotism.

When we go by the name "Christian," we proclaim our ultimate allegiance through the name we bear. By calling ourselves "Christian," we are witnesses for the one to whom we belong first and most truly—Christ.

Blessings,

Amy