

From the Pastor's Desk

24 June 2022

Next month, the Church celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, patroness of the Carmelite Order of friars, nuns, and sisters, as well as lay Carmelites, and those who are members of the Scapular Confraternity. The brown scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is shared by all of these. It is a silent sign of devotion to Our Lady, and of her constant love and protection for us in this life and in the next.

In 1988, while in seminary, I was invested as a member of the Lay Carmelite Order, and still enjoy membership in that group. Even before becoming a member of the Lay Carmelites, I fostered a devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, and wore her brown scapular, in fact, I was invested with it and made a member of the Scapular Confraternity when I was in second grade, before my First Holy Communion.

On the weekend of July 8-9, I will offer the blessing and investiture in the brown scapular to any who wish to receive it, after all Masses. If you have already been enrolled in the Scapular Confraternity, there is no need to renew your membership, since it is for a lifetime.

The Scapular Confraternity is an association of people with a common dedication to Our Lord under the loving protection of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Membership begins when one is invested with the brown scapular, and records are not kept of the number of members, since there are so many.

Wearing the brown scapular promises the wearer a share in the prayers and good works of the entire Carmelite family of religious and lay members of the Order. Not only is it a sign of affiliation to the Carmelite Order, but it inspires those who wear it to commit their lives to God in the spirit of Our Lady.

The brown scapular most people wear is a miniature version of the large scapular which the friars and nuns of Carmel wear as part of their habit. It is a shin-length "apron" covering the front and back of the tunic, over which it is worn. Originally it was worn to protect the tunic from dirt and wear, and eventually came to symbolize the protection of God's grace, the yoke of Christ, and the motherly care of Our Lady.

Pious tradition tells us that in 1251, St. Simon Stock, Prior General of the Carmelite friars had a vision of Our Lady in Aylesford, England, giving him the scapular as part of the Order's habit. Shortly before that time, the original Carmelite hermits had to flee from Mt. Carmel in the Holy Land, due to the fall of the Crusader states to the Muslim invasions. When they arrived in Europe many in the Church thought they should be amalgamated into the monastic or mendicant orders already in existence. Under this pressure, St. Simon composed the prayer "Flos Carmeli", asking Our Lady for her help. Although there is no historical record of this until more than a hundred years after the setting of the story, the Carmelite Order has believed that the scapular was adopted by the Order at that time. The "scapular promise" was also alleged to have been given to St. Simon as well, stating that "whoever would wear the Carmelite habit would receive the gift of final perseverance". The Church has not made any official pronouncement on the vision of St. Simon, nor the "promise", in favour or against them.

Another "promise" one hears of in connection to the brown scapular is the "Sabbatine Privilege", which finds its origin in a forged document attributed to Pope John XXII, alleging that in 1322 Our Lady appeared to him and said that on the first Saturday after a person's death that she would deliver them from purgatory if they wore the scapular, observed chastity according to their vocation, and prayed the Office of the Virgin Mary each day, or fasted twice a week. This has universally been declared a forgery and the Church does not teach the claims it makes.

Officially, the Carmelite Order merely encourages a belief of Mary's aid and prayerful assistance for wearers of the Brown Scapular that live and die in the state of grace, observe chastity according to their state in life, and live a life of prayer and penitence, and commends devotion to Mary especially on Saturdays.

The Church's official position regarding the brown scapular is that it is a garment that we wear as both a sign of our belonging to Mary and pledge of her maternal protection in this life and the next. It is also a sign of three entwined elements: 1) belonging to the Carmelite family, 2) consecration to and trust in Mary, and 3) an incentive to imitate Our Lady's virtues, especially her humility, chastity, and prayerfulness. That is all. The Church has made no official pronouncements regarding St. Simon Stock, the "Sabbatine privilege", or any other particular rules and rewards attached to wearing the scapular.

The brown scapular is not a sacrament, only a sacramental, a gift from, and under the authority of the Church, which does not give us sanctifying grace; it does not make us holy. Rather, sacramentals remind us to live holiness by celebrating the sacraments worthily and regularly, especially the Holy Eucharist and reconciliation.

The scapular is not some kind of lucky amulet or magic talisman. The Church condemns superstition, and we should never treat sacramentals superstitiously. Sacramentals used with faith can help us live out our faith better, and can even be a means of evangelization when someone asks us what they are.

The brown scapular may be made of any cloth that is dark brown in colour, no image or wording is needed on the cloth panels. The strings connection the two panels can be of any colour or material, even chain. It is worn over the shoulders, one panel in front, the other on the back. It's not necessary to wear it next to the skin, it may even be enclosed in a locket or plastic case. It can even be substituted by wearing the scapular medal, which has Our Lady of Mt. Carmel on the front, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the back.

If one who is enrolled in the Scapular Confraternity should put wearing it aside for some time, even years, no new enrolment is necessary. The person simply begins to wear it again, once again sharing in the spiritual goods of the Carmelite family. Scapulars may be washed with gentle hand soap. If it is damaged, you do not need to have the new replacement scapular blessed.

Since the scapular is blessed, like all blessed sacramentals, they should not be thrown into the trash. To dispose of a blessed sacramental, we should either burn it or bury it.

If you are interested in obtaining some quality, long lasting scapulars, I'd suggest looking at the following sites: <https://carmelitegiftshop.org/scapulars> or <https://scapulars.com> .

May Our Lady, and good St. Joseph, the protector of Carmel watch over you and yours this summer!

In Christ,

Fr. Pat

Flos Carmeli

O beautiful Flower of Carmel, most fruitful vine, splendour of heaven, holy and singular, who brought forth the Son of God while ever remaining a virgin, assist us in our necessities! O Star of the Sea, help and protect us. Show unto us that you are our Mother! Amen.