

## The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is best understood in the context of our Catholic faith. It offers us a rich spiritual tradition that honors Mary as the first and foremost of her Son's disciples. This scapular is an outward sign of the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our sister, mother and queen. It offers an effective symbol of Mary's protection to the Order of Carmel its members, associates, and affiliates as they strive to fulfill their vocation as defined by the Carmelite Rule of Saint Albert: "to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ."

The Church on her faith pilgrimage finds its best model in Our Lady. The example of the Blessed Virgin leads the faithful to conform themselves to the Son. But it also leads them to celebrate the mysteries of Christ with the profound attitude that the Virgin had when she was by her Son at his birth and at the Epiphany, at his death and resurrection. That is, it urges them to guard zealously the Word of God to meditate on it lovingly; to praise God with exultation and to thank him joyfully; to serve God and neighbor faithfully and to offer generously for them even life itself, to pray to the Lord perseveringly and to implore confidently; to be merciful and humble; to "wait vigilantly for the coming of the Lord." (\*\* The Doctrinal Statement on the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Approved English text of the doctrinal section of the "Rite of Blessing of and Enrollment in the Scapular of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel" as issued and confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship and for the Discipline of the Sacraments, November 29, 1996.)

While Christ alone has redeemed us, the Blessed Virgin Mary has always been seen by Catholics as a loving mother and protector. The Blessed Virgin has shown her patronage over the Order of Carmel



from its earliest days. This patronage and protection came to be symbolized in the scapular, the essential part of the Carmelite habit.

Stories and legends abound in Carmelite tradition about the many ways in which the Mother of God has interceded for the Order, especially in critical moments of its history. Most enduring and popular of these traditions, blessed by the Church, concerns Mary's promise to an early Carmelite, Saint Simon Stock, that anyone who remains faithful to the Carmelite vocation until death will be granted the grace of final perseverance. The Carmelite Order has been anxious to share this patronage and protection with those who are devoted to the Mother of God and so has extended both its habit (the scapular) and affiliation to the larger Church.



Private revelation can neither add to nor detract from the Church's deposit of faith. Therefore, the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel echoes the promise of Divine Revelation: The one who holds out to the end is the one who will see salvation (Matthew 24:13), and Remain faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is a reminder to its wearers of the saving grace which Christ gained upon the cross for all: All you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in him (Galatians 3:27). There is no salvation for anyone other than that won by Christ. The Sacraments mediate this saving grace to the faithful. The sacramentals, including the scapular, do not mediate this saving grace but prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

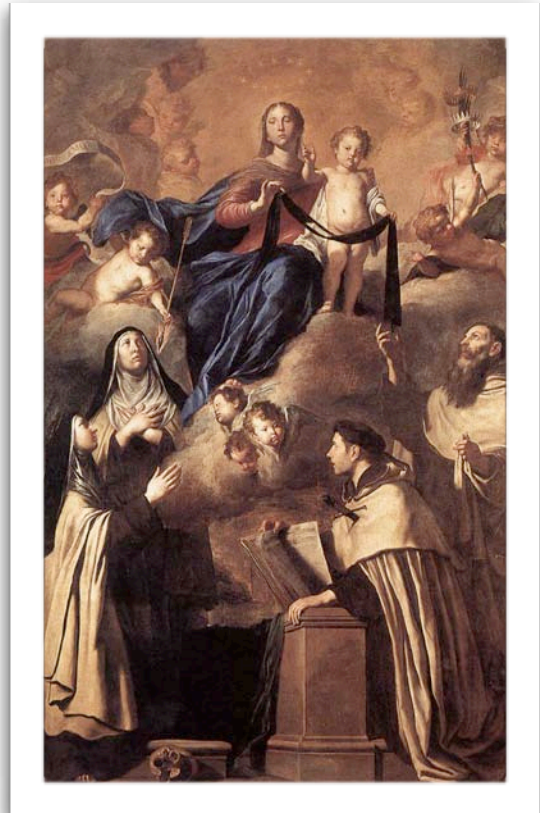
Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church's prayer they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. For well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the Paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. (CC 1670)

We see, therefore, that the Church clearly teaches that all grace, including that of final perseverance, is won for us by the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord. Simply wearing the Brown Scapular does not confer that same result.

The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the habit of the Carmelite Order. For the religious members of the Order it takes the form of two long, undecorated panels of brown cloth joined at the shoulders and falling, one to the front and one to the back. For the laity it takes the form of two smaller pieces of brown or dark cloth, preferably plain, joined over the shoulder by ribbons, and falling, one to the back, the other to the front. As the Order's habit, the scapular signifies some degree of affiliation to the Carmelites.

Carmelite tradition declares, not so much from a vision as from the living faith of the men and women of Carmel over eight centuries, that we the Carmelites enjoy a special protection by the Mother of God as a sign of her love for us and her appreciation of our trust and confidence in her and our devotion to her as our model for living a life of allegiance to her Son.

We Carmelites are willing even anxious to share this protection and favor that Mary shows us as we are anxious to share the trust and confidence we place in her and our devotion to her. A visible sign of our sharing this protection and this devotion is the scapular. It is the Carmelite Order not the Blessed Virgin who gives the scapular to the faithful and invites the faithful to share our charism in expectation of the graces won by Christ and bestowed on Carmel and its members through the intercession of the Mother of God. The Graces are bestowed on the Family of Carmel; the scapular is a sign of belonging in some way and to some varying degree to the family of Carmel.



## **Pope John Paul II & the Brown Scapular**

"Carmelites have chosen Mary as their Patroness and spiritual Mother and always keep before the eyes of their heart the Most Pure Virgin who guides everyone to the perfect knowledge and imitation of Christ.

In Carmel therefore and in every soul moved by tender affection for the Blessed Virgin and Mother, there has thrived a contemplation of her, who from the beginning knew how to open herself to hearing God's Word and to obeying his will (Lk 2: 19, 51). (Message of Pope John Paul II to the Carmelite Family on the 750th Anniversary of the Bestowal of the Scapular 25 March 2001.)

"I, from my youngest days, have worn around my neck the Scapular of Our Lady and I take refuge with trust under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus. I hope the Scapular will be for everyone, especially the faithful who wear it, a help and defense in times of danger, a seal of peace and a sign of Mary's care." (Pope John Paul II, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Castelgandolfo July 16, 2003)

## **Who may invest people with the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel?**

According to the Rite for the Blessing and Enrollment in the Scapular of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, approved by the Holy See in 1996, any priest or deacon has the faculties for blessing the scapular. The official ritual provided by the Holy See makes no provision for someone other than a priest or deacon to bless the scapular.

True devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary consists in three things: VENERATION, CONFIDENCE AND LOVE. By simply wearing the Scapular, we can tell her every moment of the day that we venerate her, love her and trust in her protection.

**Notes and references:**

**\*\* A Catechesis on the Brown Scapular - Father Sam Anthony Morello, OCD and Father Patrick McMahon, O.Carm. Imprimatur of Archbishop, Cardinal James Hickey, Archdiocese of Washington DC.**

**\*\* Message of Pope John Paul II to the Carmelite Family on the 750th Anniversary of the Bestowal of the Scapular 25 March 2001.**

**\*\* Pope John Paul II, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Castelgandolfo July 16, 2003**

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