

It is a sign:

- which has been approved by the Church for over seven centuries;
- which stands for the decision to
 - follow Jesus like Mary:
 - be open to God and to his will
 - be guided by faith, hope, and love
 - to pray at all times
 - to discover God present in all that happens around us.

"Just as men take pride in having others wear their livery, so the Most Holy Mary is pleased when her servants wear her scapular as a mark that they have dedicated themselves to her service and are members of the Family of the Mother of God." - St. Alphonsus Ligouri

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Pamphlet 187

The Brown Scapular

In Latin the word *scapula* means shoulder; and for many centuries the garment which all workmen work over their clothes to preserve them from wear and from stains was called for this reason a scapular. It was formed of two wide bands of material which joined on the shoulders, and reached to the knees both back and front, leaving a hole in the middle for the head to pass through. It has been a very long time since this type garment has been commonly worn, and the scapular is now a religious insignia established by the Carmelites in the thirteenth century. The Carmelite order, instituted in the earlier ages of Christianity, and always characterized by a special devotion to the Blessed Mother of God, was obliged to abandon the ancient monastery of Mount Carmel in Palestine to avoid the fury of the Turks.

The Carmelite monks took refuge in Europe, where they met with many difficulties, so much so that the Order seemed about to perish, when St. Simon, their Superior, made a last appeal to Heaven to prevent this catastrophe. Redoubling his austerities and his prayers he offered himself anew with all his brethren to the Glorious Queen of heaven, entreating her to come to their aid. His confidence was well founded, and in these words the holy religious related to his brethren the results of his prayer: "My beloved brethren, blessed be God, who never abandons those who hope in Him, and does not despise the prayer of His servants; and blessed be also the Most Holy Virgin,

Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who, being mindful of His mercy toward His people, makes haste to help us in the midst of the great tribulations which surround us on all sides! To me who am only dust and ashes, as I opened my heart in the presence of God, and asked the Blessed Virgin to grant some unmistakable sign of her protection and love to the ancient religious family of the Carmelites, whom she herself had honored with the title of Brethren of the Blessed Virgin Mary, ...to me the Holy Mother of God deigned to appear, resplendent with glory, and holding in her hand a mysterious scapular: "Receive, my son," she said to me, "this vestment, which shall be henceforth the distinguishing mark of the Order of Mount Carmel and of my confraternity; shall be a powerful safeguard to thee and to all thy brethren. Whoever shall live a holy life, and die in his sacred habit, shall avoid the flames of hell, and shall ever be accompanied by my maternal protection."

The religious were all eager to be invested with this scapular, which thus became the glorious uniform of the Blessed Virgin; and the Sovereign Pontiffs, approving this pious institution, have enriched with many indulgences not only of the Order of the Carmelites, but also a confraternity of the faithful living in the world, and wearing also, beneath their ordinary clothing, the scapular of the Blessed Virgin.

It may be easily understood that it then became necessary to modify the size of the ancient scapular, and to replace it by two pieces of brown cloth, united by two cords

passing over the shoulders. For us, as for the religious of Mount Carmel, the scapular is a sacred warrant of the protection of the Holy and Immaculate Mother of God, during the whole of our life, and particularly at the moment of death.

Nevertheless, in order to share in the special benedictions promised by the Blessed Virgin, and to gain the indulgences granted by the Popes, it is not sufficient merely to wear this simple insignia, it is also necessary to be invested in the scapular by a Carmelite, or a priest duly authorized by the Holy See. But it is still more necessary to remember one thing, without which it would be useless to wear all the scapulars in the world, and that is that if you do not live a Christian life, if you violate the commandments of God and the laws of His Church, and especially if you profane by immorality this Sacred Scapular bestowed by the most chaste, most holy, and immaculate Virgin Mary, you will not escape the terrible judgments of God, and the promises of the Blessed Virgin will pass to others who are more worthy.

Receive if possible, and as soon as possible, the holy scapular. The priest who invests you will gladly explain more fully than I can do here the graces with which the Church has enriched the Carmelite Confraternity, and particularly the numerous indulgences attached to it. Among others there is a plenary indulgence to be gained upon the day of reception.

(See also pamphlet 160. The Theology of Indulgences)

Rules and Rituals

- People are enrolled in the Scapular only once by a priest or authorized person.
- The Scapular can be replaced afterwards by a medal, which has on one side the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and on the other, the image of Mary.
- The Scapular holds us to live as authentic Christians in line with the teaching of the Gospel, to receive the sacraments, to profess our special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, which should be expressed each day, at least by saying the Hail Mary three times.

Short form of giving the scapular

Receive this Scapular, a sign of your special relationship with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whom you pledge to imitate. May it be a reminder to you of your dignity as a Christian in serving others and imitating Mary. Wear it as a sign of her protection and of belonging to the family of Carmel, voluntarily doing the will of God and devoting yourself to building a world true to his plan of community, justice and peace.

The Carmelite Scapular **is not**:

- a magical charm to protect you
- an automatic guarantee of salvation
- an excuse for not living up to the demands of the Christian life