

*July 16th - Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel*  
*The Brown Scapular*



*Corpus Christi Catholic Parish*

*Bringing Christ to the People & Bringing the People to Christ*  
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## **The History of the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel**

On 16 July 1251, St Simon Stock, who was then the superior of the Order of the Carmelites, received an apparition from Our Lady. She handed him a brown scapular saying, "Receive, my beloved son, this scapular of thy Order; it is the special sign of my favor, which I obtained for thee for they children of Mount Carmel. He who dies clothed with this habit shall be preserved from eternal fire. It is the badge of salvation, a shield in time of danger, and a pledge of special peace and protection."

However, the history of the brown scapular begins long before the 13th century, originating with the mantle of the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament! To bring the people back from their worship of the false god Baal the prophet Elijah prayed for a drought, which lasted for three and a half years. After this, Elijah climbed Mt. Carmel to petition for the rain to return. A cloud in the shape of a foot came and provided much-needed rain. (See 1 Kings 18:41-46)

Pious tradition holds the cloud represented Our Lady's heel crushing the devil, as prophesied in Genesis. We also recognize Mary as the Mediatrix of graces, for out of a single cloud flowed an immense quantity of rain, or grace, which quenched the parched desert.

Following the event, Elijah formed a community of hermits on Mt. Carmel. These Jewish "carmelites" awaited the return of Elijah to announce the coming of the Messiah. After Pentecost, it is believed that these hermits were converted to Christianity. It was out of this community the Carmelite Order was born in the late 11th century.

## **The Devotion of the Brown Scapular**

The scapular in the well-known smaller form came about by at least 1276, adopted by laymen who had worked with the community as a pious tradition. Over the years a great many holy men and women developed devotions to the Brown Scapular, including St. Teresa of Avila, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. John Vianney, St. Bernadette Soubirous, St. Maximilian Kolbe and Pope St. Pius X. Pope St. John Paul II was also known for his devotion to the sacramental, famously instructing surgeons to leave his scapular on him during the operation after the 1981 assassination attempt. Of this sacramental, the Pope said: "The sign of the Scapular points to an effective synthesis of Marian spirituality, which nourishes the devotion of believers and makes them sensitive to the Virgin Mother's loving presence in their lives."

The scapular is not really in the same category as blessed medals or other objects, rather it should be thought of as a piece of clothing. Indeed, we are "invested" (i.e. "dressed") in the scapular, after the manner that a Carmelite monk or nun is given a religious habit to wear. This is why a cloth scapular is preferred to wood or metal.

Our scapular is a reminder of the constant protection and love of Mary for each of her children. We are "clothed" with the virtues of Mary, and even of Christ.

## What are the requirements of the Brown Scapular?

Wearing the scapular is traditionally associated with the praying of the breviary or of the Little Office of Mary (a collection of psalms said at various points through the day). However, it is now permissible to pray five decades of the rosary daily to fulfill the obligations of the scapular - even here, it is good to recall that we are all simply trying to grow in holiness and devotion, we should start wherever we are and simply try to do better each day. If we forget or fail to pray the rosary on a given day, there is no additional sin committed by wearing the scapular - we simply ask our Lady's help to strive to grow more and more each day. I should also note that there is a strong tradition of abstaining from meat on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays throughout the year as a practice associated with wearing the scapular - it isn't mandatory, but perhaps something worth considering (even just restricting ourselves to meat at only one meal on Wednesdays and Saturdays, with meatless Fridays).

## What are the promises associated with the Brown Scapular?

Our Lady promised to St. Simon Stalk that those who wear the scapular with devotion will be saved. This is not to be interpreted in a superstitious manner, as though the scapular were some sort of “charm” or “loop-hole” into heaven. However, certainly our Lady will give special graces to the one who wears the scapular devoutly - if we trust in Mary and place ourselves under her care and protection, we will find the grace necessary to be saved. The scapular is a most powerful and easy means of gaining salvation! Wearing the scapular doesn't mean we can go on sinning as we please, rather this devotion will break the bonds of sin so that we can live a life of freedom in the law of the Gospel.

Many also speak of the *sabattine privilege* whereby Mary is said to have promised Pope John XXII that anyone who dies wearing the scapular will be freed from purgatory on the following Saturday. Although some of the stories associated with this promise are not based in history, there can be no doubt that Mary's love and care for her children does not end with death but continues even into Purgatory. Who could doubt but that our Lady's special patronage is felt by the Holy Souls on Saturdays, the day which is specially dedicated to her honor? I would invite you to pray in a special way on Saturdays for the souls in purgatory who died wearing a scapular, and trust that thers will pray for you if you find yourself in Purgatory on a Saturday!



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