

The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel

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THE BROWN SCAPULAR HAS BEEN CALLED “The Livery of Our Lady”, “Grace Garment” and the “Sign of Mary”. The scapular is a sign of the Queen Mother’s maternal care for the souls of all her children, all those who wear it with filial and [true devotion](#). In their love of and obedience to the Virgin Mary, they imitate Jesus, who fully aware of His Divine mission and fully cognizant of His Divine relationship with His Eternal Father, nonetheless, submitted himself to the Virgin Mary ([Luke 2:51](#)). Saint Luke informs his readers that “subject” to Her and to St Joseph,

“Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man” ([Luke 2: 51-52](#)).

As the mother of Jesus, and of His Church, the Queen Mother assists her children to advance in wisdom and favor before God (and before men) until they become one with Him as members of His “Mystical Body”.

Although every member of the mystical *Body of Christ* has Mary for his or her mother, the Brown Scapular of Mt. Carmel is a *singular* Sign of Mary’s highly favored Carmelite family, her “favoured” children, the children of a family that has produced more saints than any other spirituality in the history of Christendom. This seems to be one of the reasons why **the Virgin Mary choose to appear at Fatima as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel** and to offer the Brown Scapular of Carmel to all her children. The spirituality of Mt. Carmel was the spirituality of Sister Lucia, of the Holy Father John Paul II, of Doctors of the Church such as Saints John of the Cross and

Theresa of Avila as well as Terese of Lisieux and of so many outstanding models of perfection that inspire souls to avail themselves of this proven way to holiness and Christian perfection. Those who heard Jesus speak in the synagogues of Nazareth were spellbound and unaware of where He had gained His knowledge and wisdom prompting them to ask:

“Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary... Whence therefore hath he all these things”
[*\(Matt13:53-56\)?*](#)

Although His countrymen were unaware of the origin of His wisdom and unaware that they had answered their own question, the Saints of Christendom were, and are, fully aware that Jesus received his virtue, learning, and wisdom from his parents, St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus, when Sister Lucia (one of the three shepherd-children who communed with Our Lady at Fatima) was asked why Our Lady held out the Scapular following the October 13, 1917 Miracle of the Sun, she replied, because **“Our Lady wants all of Her children to wear it.”** The scapular is a sign of her maternal help and protection, a “grace garment” emblematic of Her regal and motherly authority and of Her ordained ability to assist their growth in virtue, wisdom and love necessary to overcome the world, the weakness of their flesh, their passions and the pride of life, which diminish their strength and by degrees render them increasingly prone to the cunning of superior angelic beings.

Origin of the Scapular

As recorded in the Old Testament, 850 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Elijah challenged the Satanic priests of Baal (pagan priests supported by King Ahab – the seventh King of Israel – who led the nation into the spiritual sin of apostasy) to a spiritual contest pitting the God of

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob against the pagan god Baal. Three years earlier, Elijah had entered Jerusalem to confront Ahab warning him to return to the God of Israel or the nation would be chastised. Ahab brazenly dismissed the prophet. Since that day, the day that Elijah was expelled by Ahab from the royal palace, no rain was released over the Holy Land nor was a cloud seen. Three years later Israel found itself in the throes of severe famine. It was then that Elijah rebuked Ahab and summoned him to Mt. Carmel along with the apostate priests and false-prophets of Baal:

“And when Ahab had seen Elijah, he said: Art thou he that troublest Israel? And Elijah said: I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house, who have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and have followed Baalim. Nevertheless send now, and gather unto me all Israel, unto Mt.Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, who eat at Jezabel’s table ([1 Kings 18: 17-19](#)).

Elijah pleaded with the crowd to return to God:

“How long do you halt between two sides? If the Lord be God, follow Him! but if Baal, follow him!”

But no one spoke a word in favor of the God of Israel thereby prompting the prophet to propose a contest. Both he and the apostate prophets would build altars, place a holocaust on them and pray to their God/god to send down a consuming fire. The God/god who sent down the unquenchable fire would be acknowledged as the true God of Israel. The druid apostates prayed and slashed themselves for hours to no avail. Most Christians know this story, how the prophet **Elijah prayed and God immediately sent down fire** from heaven to consume his sacrifice followed by the slaying of the prophets of Baal. These memorable events, however, are *not* the main focus of the scriptural account. Like an “after party”, the main focus is

actually what happened afterward, the “after event”.

What happened Afterward?

Immediately afterward, King Ahab went off to dine and refresh himself while Elijah proceeded to the top of Mt. Carmel where he crouched down to the earth and put his head between his knees to pray. Elijah then summoned his servant to go and look out over the sea and come back and tell him what he observed. Six times the servant went forth and came back with the same reply:

“I see nothing”

Neither King Ahab, Elijah’s servant, nor anyone among the gathered multitude knew that the prophet was about to “behold a prophetic vision of the spiritual Salvation of all mankind through an Immaculate Virgin” ([John Haffert – Co-Founder World Apostolate of Fatima](#))

Elijah sent his servant a **seventh time** (seven indicating the fullness of time). The servant then observed a *mysterious cloud rising out of the sea in the shape of a human foot ([1 Kings 18:43-44](#))*.

Years later, Elijah conveyed to the prophets of Mt. Carmel that **this mysterious foot foreshadowed the coming of an Immaculate Virgin who would rise out of the sea of humanity to bring grace and consolation to the world: the foot of the “Woman” that would crush the head of Satan (as Elijah had just crushed his false-prophets, the prophets of Baal) as prophesied in [Gen 3:15](#)**.

This mysterious “Woman” is revealed by St. John to be the the Virgin Mary ([Rev 11:19 – 12:1-6](#)) the “Great Sign” the new and mystical **Ark of the Covenant, the Holy Tabernacle in which God dwells**; She is also the prophetic and eschatological

“Woman” who, along with her “seed” ([Rev 12:17](#)), will crush the head of Satan as foretold in Genesis. As such, she is symbolized by both foot and cloud.

*“Then the **cloud** covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting, because the **cloud** settled down upon it and **the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle** (as He filled the Virgin Mary with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, [Rev 11:19-12:1](#), and overshadowed Her with His glory at the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel – [Luke 1:35](#)). Whenever the cloud rose from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on their journey. But if the **cloud** did not lift, they would not go forward; only when it lifted did they go forward. **The cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day**, and fire in the cloud at night, in the sight of the whole house of Israel in all the stages of their journey” ([Exodus 40: 34-38](#)), as the Virgin Mary accompanied Jesus at every stage of His journey, birth to death – She was there.*

As soon as Elijah was told of the mysterious cloud in the shape of a foot he rose from prayer; then the heavens grew dark with moisture laden clouds and cascading winds. As the clouds passed over the land for the first time in three years water fell, like divine grace, to renew God’s people.

*“Go up, and look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said: There is nothing. And again he said to him: Return seven times. And **at the seventh time, behold, a little cloud arose out of the sea like a man’s foot... behold the heavens grew dark, with clouds, and wind, and there fell a great rain.** ([Kings I, 18:43-44](#)).”*

Some two thousand, one hundred and ten years later (1260) King Saint Louis of France found himself leading a Crusade to the Holy Land; while there, he was told of holy-men descended from the long line of Elijah who lived on Mt. Carmel. The king

ascended Carmel and found on its heights a remnant of monks living among its caves and hollows. Appropriately, they called themselves the "Hermits of St. Mary of Mt. Carmel". Due to the Muslim onslaught, these hermits were being forced to emigrate to Europe.

Before doing so, they told King Louis that they were descended from the prophet Elijah. They told him that they were called hermits of Saint Mary because of the foot shaped cloud Elijah had seen coming out of the sea. This foot, they said, was a prophetic foreshadowing of the "Woman" foretold by God, an Immaculate Virgin, who was to conceive the savior and crush the pride of Satan beneath the humble heel of Her seed.

THEY ALSO SAID THAT THE PROPHET ELIJAH HAD COMMANDED HIS FOLLOWERS TO PRAY FOR THE COMING OF THIS VIRGIN SAYING THAT "THE CLOUD WAS A DIVINE MALEDICTION AGAINST THE DEVIL":

"I shall place enmities between thee and the Woman, thy seed and Her seed . . . thou shalt lie in wait for Her heel and She shall crush thy head . . . ,([Gen 3:15](#))"

A short fifty years later (after the visit of King Louis), The Virgin Mary appeared to **Saint Peter Thomas** (a French Carmelite and General to the Papal Court of Pope Clement VI at Avignon) and told him that **the Order of Mt. Carmel would endure to the end of the world.** She told Saint Peter that "Elijah (the order's founder), obtained it (the promise) a long time ago from my Son." Three Hundred years following this exchange between St. Louis and the Hermits of Mt. Carmel, Jesus Himself revealed to Saint Teresa of Avila, that this same order of hermits should be known as "The Order of the Virgin".

Six years before King Louis transported the hermits to France, a group of crusaders had already taken others to England. While in England, an unusual holy man by the name of **Simon Stock** joined them at the request of the Virgin Mary who had made their landing in England known to him. Like another

Elijah, Simon departed from the world and dwelt alone in the English forest living in the hollow of a tree trunk. The Virgin Mary personally appeared to him and told him that her sons from Carmel were coming to England and that he should join them. A short six years later (1245) Simon was made General of the entire order. The *Order of the Virgin*, however, was despised by its English hosts for their austere and foreign spirituality. Throughout England the secular clergy rose against these begging ill-clad mendicants. Several times, under Simon's leadership, it appeared as if the *Order of Our Lady* would dissolve. The young general, abandoned, perplexed, and infirm, retired in seeming defeat to consider how the Queen Mother would preserve Her order.

In the words of the [Little Flower](#), St Terese of Lisieux, referring to Saint Simon Stock:

"It was an illness in which Satan assuredly had a hand . . . He little knew, however, that the Queen of Heaven was keeping a faithful and affectionate watch from above...and was making ready to still the tempest just as the frail and delicate stem was on the point of breaking."

Exciting himself to deep prayer, Simon cried out from the depth of his soul and then recited the "*Flos Carmeli*" or "*Flower of Carmel*", which after the *Hail Mary* is often called "the most beautiful of all Marian prayers":

*"Flower of Carmel, Vine blossom laden, Splendor of Heaven,
Childbearing maiden,
None equals thee!
O Mother benign, Who no man didst know, On all Carmel's
children
Thy favors bestow, Star of the Sea!"*

As he raised his head from this prayer, the room was bathed in bright light. Three in his midst stood the Blessed Virgin

surrounded by a cohort of angels. She descended toward him holding in her hands a brown scapular. Extending it forth she spoke the following words:

“RECEIVE, MY BELOVED SON, THIS HABIT OF THY ORDER: THIS SHALL BE TO THEE AND TO ALL CARMELITES A PRIVILEGE, THAT WHOSOEVER DIES CLOTHED IN THIS SHALL NEVER SUFFER ETERNAL FIRE.”

This extraordinary privilege was later extended to all the faithful who accept the Virgin as their Spiritual Mother and don Her livery, the Brown Scapular of Mt. Carmel. In the words of [**Pope Pius IX**](#):

*“This most extraordinary gift of the Scapular from the Mother of God to Saint Simon Stock brings its great usefulness not only to the Carmelite Family of Mary **but also to all the rest of the faithful** who wish, affiliated to that Family, to follow Mary with a very special devotion.”*

All who are enrolled in the Brown Scapular belong to the Carmelite Family as members of the Scapular Confraternity.

Many popes have underscored the veracity of this maternal pledge. They have ratified this privilege of eternal salvation, salvation that comes through the eternal merits of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ assisted by His heavenly Mother, the Woman clothed with the Sun. She has promised all of Her children, those who die clothed in Her Brown Scapular, those who have perseveringly and devoutly served Her Son, She has promised to assist them all with the grace of *final perseverance* in holiness and the grace of *final penitence by which they are saved from eternal fire*. Some of the popes who have ratified this maternal promise include: Pope Alexander V, Pope Nicholas V, Pope Sixtus IV, Pope Clement VII, Pope Paul III, Pope St. Pius V, Pope Clement VIII, Pope Leo XI, Pope Paul V, Pope Urban VIII, Pope Alexander VII, Pope Benedict XIV, Pope Pius VI, Pope St.

Pius X, Pope Benedict XV, Pope Pius XI and [Pope Saint John Paul II](#) who died clothed in his scapular.



Pope John Paul II clothed in Brown Scapular

This scapular promise caused [Pope Benedict XV](#) to proclaim:

*“Let all of you have a common language and a common armor: the language, the sentences of the gospel; the armor, the Scapular of Mary which all ought to wear and which **enjoys the singular privilege of protection even after death.**”*

The Sabbatine Privilege

Catholic theologians and authorities like **Saint Robert Bellarmine** and **Pope Benedict XIV** explained the concept that anyone dying clothed in the scapular would not suffer the fires of hell to mean that our Blessed Mother will assist them at the hour of death with the graces necessary for **final contrition** or **final perseverance in the state of grace**. The **“Sabbatine Privilege”** is a further privilege: That those who die clothed in the Brown Scapular will be released from purgatory the first Saturday following their death.

The Sabbatine Privilege does *not* permit violations of the moral law as if a wearer could sin and *be free from the guilt of punishment*. According to **Pope Pius XI**

“Those who wish to have the Blessed Mother as a helper at the

hour of death, must in life merit such a signal favor by abstaining from sin and laboring in Her Honor”

The Promise Extends into Purgatory

Ever since the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Simon Stock (July 16, 1251), multitudes have found it difficult to believe that for so fractional a devotion as belonging to Her Scapular Confraternity, a person could be blessed with salvation. So the Mother of God returned to make a Promise even more astounding! In the year after Saint Peter Thomas was informed by Her that “ the Order of Carmel is destined to exist until the end of the world”, the Queen of Heaven conferred a favor so astounding that **Pope Benedict XV** (1914-1922) pronounced the following:

*“Let all of you have a common language and a common armor: the language, the sentences of the gospel; the armor, the Scapular of Mary which all ought to wear and which **enjoys the singular privilege of protection even after death.**”*

[In 1613 the Holy Office under Pope Paul V](#) issued a decree on the Sabbatine Privilege:

*“The Carmelite Fathers may preach that the Christian people can piously believe in the aid of the souls of the brethren and confratres of the Sodality of the Most Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel. Through her continuous intercessions, pious suffrages, merits, and special protection the Most Blessed Virgin, **especially on Saturday**, the day dedicated to her by the Church, **will help after their death the brethren and members of the Sodality who die in charity.** In life they must have (1) worn the habit, (2) observed chastity according to their state, and (3) have recited the Little Office. If they do not know how to recite it, they are to (3a) observe the fasts of the Church and to **abstain from meat on Wednesdays***

and Saturdays, except for the feast of Christmas.”

In 1890 Pope Leo XIII began the process of **granting the faculty to confessors to commute the condition of abstinence into other good works** for the gaining of the Sabbatine Privilege. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia,

“The faculty to sanction this change was granted to all confessors by [Leo XIII](#) in the [Decree](#) of the Congregation of Indulgences of 11 (14) June, 1901.”

Thus, according to Pope Leo XIII, in order to gain the privilege one must:

1. **Be enrolled in the Brown Scapular Confraternity (This is a simple ceremony which can be performed by any priest).**
2. **Wear the Scapular**
3. **Observe chastity** according to one’s state in life and
4. **Recite daily the Little Office** of Our Lady, or if one does not know how to recite it, abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

However, since Pope Leo XIII, the **commutation of the fourth condition** has become a common practice. According to a statement made by the Carmelite Fathers at the National Scapular Center, **every priest now has the right to invest the faithful in the Brown Scapular and to substitute the rosary in lieu of the [Little Office](#)**. Now, other spiritual exercises may be assigned by a confessor and substituted for the fourth requirement; most pray the rosary instead.

Regarding the Sabbatine Privilege

Saint Bernardine said that the Blessed Virgin always liberates Her special devotees from the torments of purgatory and **Saint Denis the Carthusian** and **Saint Peter Damian** wrote that on the feasts of the Assumption, Christmas and Easter: “Our Lady

descends into purgatory and takes many souls from it.”

Saint John of the Cross rejoiced to die on Saturday because of this “Sabbatine” Privilege”. He died in 1591 saying:

“The Mother of God and of Carmel hastens to purgatory with grace, on Saturday, and delivers those souls who have worn Her Scapular. Blessed be such a Lady who wills that, on this day of Saturday, I shall depart from this life!”

Pope Pius XI said of the Sabbatine Privilege:

“Everyone should strive for it.”

The Sabbatine Privilege was granted by a pope and many popes have ratified it:

John XXII
Alexander V
Nicholas V
Sixtus, IV
Clement VII
Paul III
Saint Pius V
Clement VIII
Leo XI
Paul V
Urban VIII
Alexander VII
Benedict XIV
Pius VI
Pius X
Benedict XV
Pius X

Of the popes who have sanctioned the Privilege, note these words of St. Pius V (*Superna dispositione* . . . Feb. 8, 1565):

“With apostolic authority and by tenor of the present, we approve each of the privileges. (of the Carmelite Order) and also the Sabbatine.”

However, simple as it may seem, **“Our Lady revealed to the Ven. Dominic of Jesus and Mary that:**

“Although many wear my Scapular, only a few fulfill the conditions for the Sabbatine Privilege.”

Similarly, at her death the saintly Carmelite, **Frances of the Blessed Sacrament**, exclaimed:

“There are only a few who receive the Privilege because only a few fulfill the conditions”

Presumably the reason few people earn the especial privilege has to do with the observance of chastity according to a person’s state of life. That is, a married man must remain loyal to his wife and spurn all others; unmarried couples are to abstain from intercourse and foreplay until marriage; consecrated virgins are to remain virgins and priests and religious celibate. However, according to Our Lady of Fatima, **“more people go to hell for sins of the flesh than for any other reason.”** Likewise, more than one holy man or woman has quipped, **“if there were no sixth commandment we would all be in heaven.”**

It is the practice of chastity that is detrimental to many. It takes moral strength known as *natural fortitude* aided by many acts of self-denial to strengthen the will so that it may be assisted by the theological gift of fortitude to withstand temptations of the flesh. Fortitude is a virtue that must be attained by years of discipline and spiritual exercise so that a person might produce the resplendent fruit of chastity, one of the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, fruits that are evidence of the Divine Life operating in the human soul.

Thus, Pope Pius XII emphasized the value of Scapular devotion:

*“There is no one who is not aware how greatly a love for the Blessed Virgin Mother of God contributes to the enlivening of the Catholic faith and to the raising of the moral standard. These effects are especially secured by means of those devotions which more than others are seen to **enlighten the mind** with celestial doctrine and to **excite souls to the practice of the Christian life**. In the first rank of the most favored of these devotions, that of the holy Carmelite Scapular must be placed—a devotion that has produced so many and such salutary fruits.*

Pope Leo XIII articulated the same theological verity regarding devotion to the “Most Blessed Virgin of Mt. Carmel **whence flow the richest and most wholesome fruits for the soul.**”

Consequently, the Church grants a Plenary Indulgence on the day a person is enrolled in the Scapular. To gain the indulgence, a person must go to confession and receive Holy Communion within eight days and pray for the intention of the Holy Father.

The Final Word

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia:

“The Sabbatine privilege thus consists essentially in the early liberation from purgatory, through the special intercession and petition of Mary, which she graciously exercises in favour of her devoted servants preferentially – as we may assume – on the day consecrated to her, Saturday.