

The Scapular — Sign of Life

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Australian Catholic Truth Society No.acts1702 (1987)

Foreword

The scapular is a very old devotion, and sometimes old devotions become weary. I discovered in writing this pamphlet that the scapular devotion is far from weary, and for this I'm particularly indebted to Father Redemptus Valabek.

Father Redemptus, Carmelite and teacher at our international college in Rome, has written a lot about the scapular since Vatican II, and much of this pamphlet is based on his work. For his help and the encouragement of my Carmelite brothers, I'm grateful.

Bernard Shah, O.Carm.

Feast of Our Lady's Assumption 1977

1.

Remember them? Two small rectangles of brown wool, joined by two cords, and worn over the shoulders. Sometimes there was a picture of Our Lady on one of the pieces of cloth. We called them scapulars, and we wore them out of devotion to Our Lady. Children were enrolled in them after their First Communion, and sometimes after Baptism. Those two tiny pieces of cloth were almost the sign of a Catholic, a proclamation of faith. And if you wore the scapular medal instead — well, that was a sign of your faith too, but it was really only a second best. It was the cloth scapular that counted.

And there was a promise attached to them — if you died after faithfully wearing the scapular, then Our Lady would see that you got to Heaven. Of course, there was an implicit responsibility in that promise — your responsibility to lead a good Christian life, following Our Lord, growing in virtue.

It's not an exaggeration to say that millions of Catholics wore the scapular. It was a part of Catholic life — as natural and taken for granted as Sunday Mass and no meat on Friday and going to confession once a month and saying the family Rosary. A part of the Catholic life we accepted and lived.

Now, don't think that I'm going to go off on a nostalgia trip. I'm not concerned to lament the passing of the dear old days and the dear old ways. There's no point in mourning for the past — and for a Christian, that would be a denial of hope and a denial that we live in the present with Christ our Lord leading us to the future glory.

And there's a more practical and present reason for my refusing to be nostalgic about the scapular. You see, the scapular is alive and — well? Certainly well, if you don't believe in judging the

spiritual by quantity, and I don't . . . Maybe not as many people are wearing it today, but those who are do so much less routinely, and are more aware of what it really means. There's much less emphasis on the privileges, and much more emphasis on the obligation and the personal responsibility involved in wearing the scapular. The sign value of the scapular to the individual who wears it is far more dominant. It's a day to day reminder to me that I am committed to following Christ — and that Mary leads me.

The Carmelites

Where did the scapular come from? You may not know it, but its full description is the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It's a smaller form of the scapular that is part of the habit of members of the Carmelite Order.

The Carmelites evolved from a small group of monks living on Mount Carmel in Israel in the mid-twelfth century. They were given a rule in 1215 and became a religious order. Many of them were former crusaders, and while Carmelites remained in Israel after the Moslem conquest, groups of them returned to their native countries to establish monasteries there.

They weren't too popular. The bishops were just reluctantly accepting the preaching friars, the Dominicans and Franciscans — they didn't want another order, especially one of hermits with its origins in the Middle East. The Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215 had forbidden the foundation of any new orders, so these monks had no rights, the bishops claimed. The Carmelites had protectors too, especially among the families of the crusaders who'd brought them home, but the going was so tough that the Order was faced with extinction.

The crisis seems to have come towards the middle of the thirteenth century. Carmelite tradition tells that St. Simon Stock, superior of the whole order, was praying in the monastery at Aylesford in England, asking Our Lady's help and protection for the Order. Our Lady appeared to him, and giving him the scapular said, "This shall be a sign to you and to all Carmelites: whosoever dies wearing this shall not suffer eternal fire."

The Order gradually grew after this — not a dramatic growth, but a steady development. Lay people wanted to be affiliated to the Order, attracted by the spirit of prayer and devotion to Mary, and wanted some sign of their affiliation. They were given the miniature form of the scapular and became members of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel — not members of the Order, but close friends and sharers in the life and work and spiritual living of the Carmelites.

Vision or Doctrine?

Now, that's necessarily a concise account of the origin of the scapular, and obviously there are a few points that need elaboration.

The most important one is that the value of the scapular does not depend on the vision to St. Simon Stock. The vision is part of private revelation, emphasising part of the revelation of the Word that ended with the death of John the Apostle and the conclusion of his Book of Revelation in the Bible.

We don't have to believe in a private revelation. And this is particularly important when we regard the scapular. The foundation of the scapular as a particular form of Marian devotion is based very simply on the fact that Mary the Mother of God is our Mother too. And that is the longtime teaching of the Church. The scapular devotion is based on good theology, not on a particular event that may

or may not have occurred. Because it may not have. The earliest account of the vision dates from the fourteenth century, at least a hundred years after the vision is said to have happened. There is no contemporary account, let alone an eye witness account. And all we know of St. Simon Stock himself is that his name does occur in a list of the Priors General of the Order as being General about the middle of the thirteenth century. Any details of his life that we do have are stories, even legends, perhaps based on fact, but stories and legends none the less.

Now, Mary may very well have appeared to Simon in a time when his community was discouraged and fearing extinction — it would be like a loving Mother to do just that. But she may not have. The value of the scapular does not depend on whether or not she did.

I realise I have run on a bit about this, but there has been a tendency in the past to assume that the value of the scapular is based, if not completely, at least very largely on the authenticity of the scapular vision. It is not. It is based on good theology and on the Church's acceptance of it as an aid to Christian living. In fact, the Church has officially adopted the scapular as a sacramental, an object specially blessed and proclaimed by the Church as a help in following our Lord.

2. Carmel's Gift to the Church

In a very real sense, too, the scapular is Carmel's gift to the Church. Any religious order does not exist for itself — it exists for the Church. Its special spirit is used for the good of the Church.

The official title of the Carmelites is Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. This has always been our title. Our tradition is that the chapel around which were built the huts of the hermits on Mount Carmel was dedicated to Our Lady. We have always seen Mary as our Mother. We have always regarded Mary as the model we imitate in following Christ — Mary the woman of faith and trust in the Lord, Mary the woman who cared for others, Mary who listened to what the Lord was saying to her and pondered his Word in her heart.

We gave this particular vision of Mary to the Church from the beginning. But we made it concrete in the scapular. We saw — and see — the scapular as the sign of the faithful caring praying Mary who leads all men to her Son, the sign to the individual of the way he should follow.

When you are enrolled in the scapular, you become a member of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. There was a time when your name would be written in a register held at the nearest Carmelite monastery — a little formal, really, since your name doesn't need to be written down to remind you that you share in the life of the Carmelites.

Because that is what it amounts to. There's a prayer in the enrolment rite in which it's declared that those enrolled now share in all the good works, prayers, penances, liturgical prayers, Masses and caring for others of all Carmelites. I don't want to beat the drum — Carmel is part of the Church — but maybe it might help you if you wear the scapular to remember that you are in a sense united with people throughout the world who find their inspiration in the following of Christ in the Mary who prays and cares and is faithful.

Mary our Mother

"The predestination of the Blessed Virgin as Mother of God was associated with the incarnation of the divine word: in the designs of divine Providence she was the gracious mother of the Redeemer

here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, and brought forth and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son's sufferings as he died on the cross. Thus, in a wholly singular way she co-operated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace . . . The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first born among many brethren, that is, the faithful, in whose generation and formation she co-operates with a mother's love."

That is how the Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution on the Church, described Mary's motherhood. And I think that's as good a version as any of the basis of the scapular devotion. Mary, the mother of the Redeemer, the 'generous associate of the Lord.' Mary, the co-operator by obedience, hope, faith and burning charity in the work of the Saviour. Mary, the mother of Jesus who is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters — us, for we are brothers and sisters in the family of God. Mary, who is Mother of the Church.

Mary is Mother of the Church. When Pope Paul VI praised her as such at the end of the Council, he wasn't simply using a pious phrase, he was expressing a truth of faith. Mary is mother in grace, in co-operation with the saving work of her Son. You could say that she began her work as Mother of the Church when she listened to and accepted her Son's words from the cross; 'Mother, this is your son.' She continued it when she was there in the upper room with the apostles at Pentecost, comforting and encouraging by her quiet strength those still frightened men. And she has stayed with the Church down through the centuries as Mother, there in the bad times and the good.

But when Mary is called Mother of the Church, that doesn't mean simply Mother of the family that is the Church. The Church is made up of people — the Church is me in this particular time and place. Mary is *my* Mother.

Again, not just a pious phrase. Remember — Jesus is the first born of many brothers and sisters, of whom I am one. Mary cares for me, helps me, listens to me, encourages me.

Co-operation

In this way, Mary shares in her Son's love for me. Shares in it, doesn't force it, or make him turn his anger from me. I stress that, because not all that long ago people used sometimes to think of Our Lady as the preventer of God's anger, as the one who through her mercy tempered the stern justice of Jesus. That is scarcely fair to Jesus or Mary — Jesus is not some bad tempered God looking for the opportunity to punish, nor is Mary someone who uses womanly wiles to blackmail her Son into forgiveness.

Mary is an example to me of that obedience, faith, hope and burning charity that the Council talked about. She reminds me that just as she co-operated with her Son in his redeeming work, so can I too — by my faith and trust in him, by my listening to what he is saying to me in my heart and in the people and circumstances in my life, by my showing to others by the way I live that I really believe that there is hope for all of us, by my caring and bringing his love to the people in my life. And the scapular is a reminder to me of my co-operation.

Consecration

Of course, this reminder is not much good if there isn't something more basic — consecration. Consecration is dedication, commitment — belonging to God. I can wear the scapular, remind myself as often as I like that it is a sign to me of following Christ through the example of Mary, but if I don't sincerely see myself as God's man then there's no point in it. I am God's man because I am a member of God's people, and I became that when I was baptised. Baptism involves new life, and a resolution to grow in that new life. It involves, as I live it out, a realisation that this new life is God living in me — that God strengthens me — that God gives me the courage to bring his love to others.

I am God's Man. And, without being too coy and sentimental about it, I am Mary's man too. She is the Mother of the whole Body of Christ, of which I am a member. And so I am hers. She helps me to live out the love of God through her love for me, which is a reflection of her Son's. My basic commitment is to God — but Mary guides me, encourages me, cares for me with a mother's loving care. She knows the difficulties — she's human too.

3. Me a Saint?

And there's something else that is essential if my wearing the scapular is to be genuine — to strive for holiness. Because that is what being a Christian is all about. We shy off the words 'holy' and 'saint' — they seem to apply to someone unworldly, out of touch.

Yet St. Paul often used the word 'saints' when he was writing to the churches — he called the early Christians 'saints.' And what he meant was that they were persevering in being God's men, that they were trying to become closer to God and bring him closer to others. That's what holiness is — getting closer to God. A saint is not someone unworldly and out of touch — he's very much in touch with God and with people. He's close to God in prayer and he knows God — and through his ever growing love of God he becomes closer to people and brings God's love to them.

So in a sense, you and I are saints! But before we start shining up the halo, we should just remember that being a saint means persevering in knowing God and loving him, and loving our neighbour. And that's not easy — the word 'persevering' has an undertone of dogged determination. The saving grace — and it is a grace — is that we have help. God himself helps us. And we have an example to follow — his Mother and ours. The scapular does help us to follow Mary's example in coming closer to God. There are a lot of virtues in Mary that can encourage us, but I'd like to single out four — universal love, humility, purity and simplicity.

Love for All

Jesus is for everyone. That's a truth that is absolutely implicit in his redemption. And Mary is for everyone too, because she's the Mother of the Church. And everyone who comes to God comes because he belongs — however remotely and thinly — to the Church. Mary showed her universal love in her life on earth. Many of the ways in which she did this might seem very small and unimportant — but love does show itself in the small and apparently unimportant things. She got her Son to work the first recorded sign of his power at a wedding breakfast — the wine had run out, she realised the embarrassment this would cause, she got Jesus to do something about it. When she was pregnant herself, she went to stay with her elderly cousin Elizabeth to help her in her pregnancy.

She was with the apostles at Pentecost — they were still hesitant about going forth and preaching the wonderful message of Jesus, and she was simply with them, giving them courage and peace. Mary's love went out to these different people with their different needs. My love as a Christian must go to different people with their different needs — to my family, my friends, the people with whom I work or study, whom I teach or nurse, who respond to it or reject it or are ungrateful for it. It's really God's love we're talking about, mirrored through me — and God's love keeps coming, despite ingratitude or rejection.

Humility is Wonder

Mary was humble — but she didn't have your doormat humility, which constantly downgrades itself to the extent that it draws attention to itself; that's really pride. Mary had the humility which praises God because of the great things he has done for us despite our being human and weak and sinful.

Maybe we could call it wonder — the wonder that could make the Mary who said 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord' also say, 'All generations shall call me blessed.'

Or we could call it acceptance — God has loved me, therefore I must accept, and love, me too. The sort of thing that made St. Paul joyously shout, 'I rejoice in my infirmities.'

Or we could call it a marvelling gratitude — the sort of thing the writer of Psalm 139 tried to express: 'Lord, you search me and you know me . . . your hand is ever laid upon me . . . it was you who created my being, knit me together in my mother's womb; I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creation.' God is wonderful to me. He knows I'm a sinner, I'm weak, I give up pretty easily — but he's asked me to bring his love to those in my life. If I'm genuinely humble, I rejoice and thank him for his love and his choice.

It's great that he's chosen weak and faltering man to bring his loving redemption to weak and faltering man. It's great that his strength is there to firm my weakness. It's great that through my baptism he has called me to be a healer, in however small a way, of the hurts and the guilts and the despairs and the doubts and the unhappiness of those in my life — a wounded healer, certainly, but nonetheless a healer, God-chosen and God-supported.

The Pure of Heart

Mary was pure. Purity is not concerned solely with sex. It's much deeper — it is a single-minded, total commitment. It means lack of contamination; freedom from what detracts from beauty and completeness. It means integrity, consistency, faithfulness to what I should be.

The Lord talked about it in his Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the pure in heart.' Blessed are those who are faithful to their vision. Blessed are those who don't let their hearts waver from him who is their Saviour. Blessed are those who see the beauty of the Creator reflected in his creation, and respect it. Blessed are those who stand fast, despite the difficulties, because they know he walks with them. Blessed are those who are committed. Mary never wavered. Her heart was always totally committed. She was faithful — despite the panic of the flight into Egypt, the puzzlement of Simeon's 'And a sword shall pierce your heart,' the distress of the loss of her Son when he was twelve and his seemingly callous indifference when she found him, the worry about him when he started his preaching, the stark tragedy of his arrest and rigged trial and judicial murder.

She was strong, with the strength of those who know they belong to God and rejoice in their belonging.

I belong to God too — God's man. My heart is dedicated to him. I am single-minded in my determination to follow his will, wherever it might lead me. I know he loves me. I return his love, uncontaminated by any other god, knowing that human love should be a reflection of his love. Or if I am not all these things — and being sinful and weak and human I'm probably not — I strive to achieve them. And in my striving I know I'm not alone — I have God's strength and Mary's help: I can be pure of heart.

Simplicity

And Mary was simple. Not naive — simple, uncomplicated, one who had found meaning and unity in her life. She had complete peace within herself — the peace that is the calm certainty that the Lord is with us. In the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah, there's reference to the anawim, the faithful remnant of Israel, who hoped almost against hope that God would be faithful to his promise. They weren't the powerful and the rulers — they were the simple people, the little people who really trusted God.

Mary is very much one of the anawim. To those in her village not somebody particularly important, just one of them really. Great things happened to her, yet she was not thrown by them — she pondered them in her heart, rejoiced in them, grew through them to an ever greater understanding of God's will for her and an ever stronger trust in him.

You couldn't get anything much simpler than the scapular — two little pieces of cloth. It doesn't involve any fixed prayers, any special penances. I guess it represents simple trust. Maybe Christians should realise that we are the modern anawim. Maybe we should stop worrying and start trusting. Maybe we should be a lot simpler in our approach to God. Maybe we should even start approaching him.

Life has its rugged and earnest moments — and the Lord did tell us to take up our cross and follow him. At the same time, there's no call to go at it doggedly, as if we're on our own. We're not. We know he's with us. We know he lets us know that he's around — perhaps not as often as we would like, but sometimes, and very often in the little joys and happinesses of our lives. Maybe we should look more closely for the Lord in the simple and little people and moments in our lives.

4. Enrolment

There are two forms of the rite of enrolment in the scapular. The one most commonly used is the shorter form, but I'd like to take the full rite which is found in the Carmelite Ritual. I think it explains more deeply what the scapular is all about.

It begins with two psalms. The priest prays an introductory verse from Psalm 47: 'God, in your Temple we reflect on your love: God, your praise, like your name, reaches to the ends of the world. Your right hand holds the victory.' It's a simple praise and thanks — here in the church, God's place, we thank God for his love for us, we acclaim him as the eternal God who does conquer evil. Psalm 47 follows in full. It's a song of praise and thanksgiving to God because he has protected the holy mountain Sion from all its enemies. In the Christian context, Sion is the Church. The people are invited to walk through Jerusalem Sion and admire it all, and proclaim to future generations that

'God our leader is here.' The Church has been given much spiritual beauty and many gifts, including the scapular devotion.

Psalm 132 is the song of brotherhood: 'How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers.' The Church is the brotherhood of men under God, but it is big, and even in the Church there is the danger of getting lost in the crowd. The Church must reach all men, and so from the beginning there have been smaller groups in the Church, where brotherhood can be truly experienced. The Carmelite family is one of these groups — and when you are enrolled in the scapular you become part of the family. The priest then prays: 'May Christ receive you into the number of his faithful, as we include you in our prayers. May God grant you through his only-begotten Son, the Mediator between God and man, time for living well, space for doing good, constancy in persevering and the joy of coming to your heritage of eternal life. As fraternal charity joins us spiritually here on earth today, so may God's kindness, the origin and support of love, join us to his faithful in heaven. Our prayer is made in the name of Jesus the Lord.'

At the very beginning of the rite there is this emphasis that the scapular devotion is Christ centred. There is a stress on how we live out the Christian life — and a reminder that in doing this we're not alone, that we have the help of Jesus himself and of all Christians who are striving to love God and their neighbour. We are on a journey to God, and we're not going alone.

Belonging

The second prayer shows how the scapular wearer belongs to the Carmelite family: 'Heed our prayers, O Lord, and bless this servant of yours. In your name we include him in a share of all the spiritual goods and in the brotherhood of this sacred Order, dedicated in a special way to your Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grant that by your grace he may remain a devout member of your Church while growing in virtue. Aided by the prayers of this Order, may he be found worthy to achieve eternal life.'

Enrolled in the scapular, you know that you have many brothers and sisters who share your vision. Like any Order, the Carmelites have a particular spirit — with us, it is a prayerfulness encouraged by the prayerfulness of Mary, who pondered in her heart all that God said to her.

At the same time, the Carmelites are part of the Church, and the scapular devotion is truly catholic, because it encourages us to 'remain devout members of your Church while they grow in holiness.' Taken as it should be, it is a help to holiness. So far, there has been no mention of the scapular itself, which perhaps stresses that what is important about the devotion is not rules and formulas, but that it is a gift of the Church to help us come to the Lord.

Help on the Way

Now the priest blesses the scapular: 'By the divine power may the insidious darts of our enemies both visible and invisible be driven far off.' There is wickedness in the world — wickedness of men who destroy peace and the beauty of God's plan — and the Church can't shut her eyes to it. Part of the Church's mission is to protect her members from the forces of evil, and the scapular is one of her means, for it represents the love and protection of Mary. Mary warns us and urges us to 'hold on to an integral faith, a strong hope and firm love, so that we are never separated from her Son.' There's nothing extra here, nothing that even hints at the scapular wearer as a member of an elite

group — just the basic Christian way of unwavering faith, a rock-like hope, a love that goes out to all as a reflection of God's love.

The scapular is an aid to growing as a real Christian, an aid to 'protect your follower in body and soul so that he may be led to the overwhelming joy of eternal reward with all the saints.' It's a reminder that our life on earth is a pilgrimage, with the goal eternal happiness with the Lord and the saints in the everlasting brotherhood of heaven.

The priest sprinkles the scapular with holy water and puts it over the shoulders of the new wearer, while saying 'Committed follower of Christ, receive this blessed habit. Pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary that by her merits you may wear it unsullied, and that she may defend you in every adversity and lead you to life everlasting.' This sums up what the scapular means:

1. It is the habit of the Carmelite Order in mini-form.
2. It is given by the Church to a person who acknowledges his need.
3. Our Lady is the patroness and mother of this family.
4. Her aid is asked to protect the wearer through the difficulties of everyday living.
5. It's a reminder that we are on our pilgrim way to heaven.

Part of the Family

The priest then declares that the scapular wearer has a share in all the good works, prayers, penances, Masses — in fact, the living out of the Carmelite life — of all Carmelites.

We can be encouraged by the Carmelites of the past — saints like Peter Thomas, who worked for Christian unity with the Greek Orthodox in the fourteenth century; Andrew Corsini, bishop of a small Italian diocese who was a real pastor to his people; Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, people who prayed and led others to prayer; Therese of Lisieux, who did the small things well; Denis and Redemptus, who were pioneer missionaries in Indonesia; John Soreth, Prior General in the fifteenth century who founded the Carmelite nuns and the Third Order of Carmel, bringing Carmel's spirit to people in the world; Baptist of Mantua, priest and administrator and one of the great Italian poets.

And there are Carmelites closer to our own time; Edith Stein, the Jewish philosopher who became a Catholic and a Carmelite nun and died in a Nazi concentration camp; Titus Brandsma, Carmelite priest and rector of a Dutch university, journalist, who died in a concentration camp because of his opposition to Nazi control of the Catholic Press; Donal Lamont, bishop of Umtali, recently expelled from Rhodesia because he champions the rights of the black people. And there are all the Carmelites who live out the spirit of prayer and Mary the woman of trust today — the priests and brothers in their praying and parish work and teaching and missionary work and giving retreats; the nuns, with their silent life of prayer and penance; the active sisters, with their nursing and teaching and parish visitation and care for the poor; the lay people in the Third Order, who live the spirit of Carmel in the world — and you, if you wear the scapular, because you are part of the Carmelite family. So you are not alone in living out your way to God.

The rite concludes with a final blessing: 'May the Creator of heaven and earth bless you; it is Almighty God himself who in his goodness has chosen you for the society and fraternity of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. We pray that she crush the head of your adversary, the

serpent, at the hour of your death. In victory may you attain to the palm and crown of your eternal heritage. We ask this through Christ our Lord.'

Privilege and Indulgences

There used to be a concern — maybe even an over-concern — about the privileges and indulgences connected with the scapular. Perhaps our attitude today should be that the privilege is simply having Mary as our Mother, and sharing in the brotherhood and support of the Carmelite family.

It's a privilege, too, to have the scapular as a sign to me that I am God's man — a sign of Mary's care for me — a sign that she shows me the way to God — that Mary reminds me of the necessity in my own life as a Christian of love and wonder and whole-heartedness and simplicity — that I am a saint, with a rather slippery halo perhaps, but a saint because I am striving for the holiness which is loving God and my neighbour.

And indulgences? Well, in 1967 Pope Paul VI simplified the whole situation, so often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Indulgences can be described as the Church's use of the merits of our Lord and the saints to give to her members the opportunity of being relieved from some of the temporal punishment due for their sins. The problem in practice was that people often forgot that this presumed a very basic condition — that you lead a sincere Christian life, striving for sanctity. Sometimes, though, the observance of the specific conditions attached to a particular indulgence was taken to be enough — not by the Church, but by the individual: there's a lot of the Pharisee in us.

To gain any indulgence you must have a sincere resolution to keep following Christ — it's not magic, nor a convenient insurance. There are indulgences for the scapular — a plenary indulgence on the day you're enrolled and on the Carmelite feasts of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (16 July), Elijah the Prophet (20 July), St. Teresa of Avila (15 October), St. Therese of Lisieux (2 October), All Saints of the Carmelite Order (14 November) and St. John of the Cross (14 December) — subject to the usual conditions for a plenary indulgence of celebrating reconciliation, receiving communion and praying for the Pope. There's also a partial indulgence for wearing the scapular.

Only a priest may enrol you in the scapular, but it doesn't have to be a Carmelite priest — any priest has the right to do so, nor does he have to get permission from the Carmelite Provincial: the general permissions he has from his bishop cover this.

When you're enrolled in the scapular, the cloth scapular must be used, because it symbolises clothing in the habit of Mary — your scapular is a mini-version of the scapular worn by the Carmelite priests and brothers and sisters. But you may wear the scapular medal instead and there is, because of the new rules on indulgences, no difference between indulgences applying to cloth scapular and medal.

Wearing the Scapular

Nor do you have to wear scapular or medal all the time, although it's good to do so as a constant reminder that Mary is your Mother and that you are consecrated to her and follow her to the Lord. When you are enrolled in the scapular, you automatically become a member of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and so a member of the Carmelite family. Wear your scapular or medal if you can — but remember what counts is that you are part of a community in the Church, which helps and supports you on your way to the Lord.

5. God's Gift

As I write, I look out of the window and see the waves beat a few yards away on the sands of a Queensland beach. The sun shines on the water — even though this is winter — and brings out the green blue of the ocean. The waves roll in powerfully and ceaselessly, but there is something peaceful and calm about it all — a calm strength. And a sense of wonder at the God of the sky and the deeps. A sense perhaps of God's gifts — of his creation, of his love. And Mary is one of God's gifts to us.

I suppose all I have written has been about God's gift of Mary, and not so much about those two small rectangles of brown wool called the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

And that's as it should be, for the scapular is really a sign of Mary. It has no value in itself — it gains its value from the fact that it signifies to me that I am consecrated to God and am in the care of his Mother and mine — that she leads me on the way of the saint — that because she has walked the way before me she encourages me in faith and hope and love.

The ocean is a marvellous symbol of Mary — no, not the superficial symbol of its blueness, but the compelling symbol of the strength of a wholehearted trust in the Lord, of the calmness that is the peace of knowing that he walks with her, of the bright hope that the turmoil of this world is not all there is.

I look out on the ocean and I feel a sense of belonging to this great creation. I feel a sense of awe and wonder — God is mighty. But a sense of gratitude too — God is good and kind and gently considerate to his creatures. The beauty of his creation is his gift to me.

And the beauty of Mary is his gift to me — the beauty of her mothering of me, her commitment, her faith, her closeness to God.

The beauty of the Church is his gift to me — the Church which is divine and yet sometimes all too human, the Church which is made up of saints who have achieved holiness and wholeness and saints who are healers and yet wounded healers.

The beauty of Carmel is his gift to me — Carmel which is under the protection of Mary, which is a community of prayer under the guidance of God's Word in her heart, which give me the scapular through the Church as a sign of Mary in my life.

Those two small rectangles of brown wool — so simple, so unimportant in themselves. But so important in what they signify.

Appendix

Ceremony of Enrolment in the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

(The priest wears soutane and surplice, or habit, with a white stole)

Antiphon: God, in your Temple we reflect on your love. God, your praise, like your name, reaches to the ends of the world. Your right hand holds the victory.

Psalm 47: The Lord is great and worthy to be praised in the city of our God.

His holy mountain rises in beauty, the joy of all the world. Mount Sion, true pole of the earth, the Great King's City! God, in the midst of its citadels, has shown himself its stronghold. For the kings assembled together, together they advanced. They saw; at once they were astounded; dismayed, they fled in fear. A trembling seized them there, like the pangs of birth, or as the east wind destroyed the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of our God, in the city of the Lord of hosts which God upholds for ever. O God, we ponder your love within your Temple. Your praise, O God, like your name, reaches to the ends of the earth.

With justice your right hand is filled. Mount Sion rejoices; the people of Judah rejoice at the sight of your judgments. Walk through Sion, walk all round it; count the number of its towers. Review all its ramparts, examine all its castles, that you may tell the next generation that such is our God, our God for ever and always. It is he who leads us.

Psalm 132: How good and how pleasant it is, brothers dwelling in unity!

It is like precious oil upon the head running down upon the beard, the dew of Hermon which falls on the heights of Sion. For there the Lord gives his blessing, life for ever.

Antiphon: God, in your Temple we reflect on your love. God, your praise, like your name, reaches to the ends of the world. Your right hand holds the victory.

Priest: Lord have mercy.

People: Christ have mercy.

Priest: Lord have mercy.

All pray the Lord's Prayer.

Priest: Lord, save your servant

People: Who puts his trust in you.

Priest: Send him, Lord, your help from heaven

People: And aid him from Sion.

Priest: Let no enemy harm him.

People: And do not let the devil come near to hurt him.

Priest: Lord, hear our prayer.

People: And let our cry reach you.

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Priest: May Christ receive you into the number of his faithful, as we include you in our prayers.

May God grant you through his only-begotten Son, the Mediator between God and man, time for living well, space for doing good, constancy in persevering, and the joy of coming to your heritage of eternal life. As brotherly love joins us spiritually here on earth today, so may God's kindness, the origin and support of love, join us to his faithful in heaven. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Listen to our prayers, Lord, and bless your servant. In your name we include him in a share of all the spiritual goods and in the brotherhood of the Order of Carmel, dedicated in a special way to your Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grant that by your grace he may remain a faithful member of your Church and grow in holiness. Aided by the prayers of the Carmelites, may he be found worthy to live with you for ever. We ask this of you, God, who lives and reigns for ever, Amen.

Blessing of The Scapular

Priest: Lord, show us your mercy.

People: **And give us your salvation.**

Priest: Lord, all powerful God, turn us to you.

People: **Turn your face towards us, and we will be saved.**

Priest: Lord, hear our prayer.

People: **And let our cry reach you.**

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Priest: We ask you, Lord, that the blessing of your goodness might come down on this habit which your servant is to wear, and that by your divine power the cunning and vicious attacks of our enemies, both visible and invisible, be driven off. Amen.

God, leader of your people and Saviour of the human race, bless this habit which your servant is to wear because of his love and devotion to your Mother the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. Give him a proper understanding of it, so that it may protect him in body and soul and he may be led to the overwhelming joy of eternal reward with all the saints. This we ask of you the God who lives and reigns for ever, Amen.

God, you are the creator, the preserver and the Saviour of all men, and the giver of spiritual help. Bless this habit so that he who wears it will feel your strength and hold to a faith that is complete, a hope that is strong and a love that will last. May it be a way of bringing him ever closer to you, the God who lives and reigns for ever, Amen.

Then the priest sprinkles the scapular with holy water and puts it over the shoulders of the new wearer:

Priest: Follower of the Lord in faith and hope, take this blessed habit. Pray to Our Lady that with her help you will wear her sign as perfectly as you can. Ask her to look after you in every trouble and lead you to everlasting life, Amen.

He tells the new wearer of his share in Carmelite life:

Priest: Using the power given me, I make you a sharer in all the spiritual good works which the Carmelites shall ever do in their co-operation with the mercy of Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The priest gives the final blessing:

Priest: May the Creator of heaven and earth bless you. It is Almighty God himself who by his love has chosen you for the brotherhood of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. We pray that when you come to die she will crush the head of your enemy the serpent. May your birthright, the palm of victory and the crown of glory, be yours for ever. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

This is a translation from the Latin of the ceremony in the Carmelite Ritual. The psalms are from the Grail translation (copyright The Grail, England, 1963). They may be replaced by other translations, such as the recent 'Psalms Now,' by Leslie F. Brandt (Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide 1977).

Our Lady of Mount Carmel — woman and mother you stand, human like us yet something more than us in your humanity.

For where we distrust you trust; where we falter you walk firmly knowing you are not alone; where we pray because we fear you listen calmly to God and ponder his words in your heart; where we do not want to get involved you reach out and care; where we are scared you are unafraid because you know God is on your side.

Mary, Mother, show me your love. Cast your cloak of Carmel about me so that I may trust in my God, walk in his way knowing he is beside me, listen to him in my heart and in my life, have the courage to risk reaching out and caring.

Stay with me, Mary.
