

THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MT CARMEL



Although devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel is very ancient, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was begun in the late 14th century in order to commemorate the approval of the rule of the Carmelite Order a hundred years earlier. The feast was assigned to 16 July, because on that date in 1251, according to Carmelite traditions, the scapular was given by the Blessed Virgin to St. Simon Stock. The feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel entered the Calendar of the universal Church in the early 18th century. The object of the feast is the special protection of Mary for those who profess themselves her servants by wearing her scapular.

THE BROWN SCAPULAR

According to tradition the Blessed Virgin appeared to St. Simon Stock at Cambridge, England, on Sunday, 16 July 1251. She held a scapular in her hand, showed it to him and promised to answer his appeal and provide help for the Carmelites, the religious order to which he belonged. She promised:

- Her special protection for the Carmelites and for all those wearing the Carmelite habit.
- Special aid, especially in the hour of death, to those wearing the habit in her honour throughout life, so that they might enjoy the glory of heaven.

Indirectly, this promise is extended to all who show their devotion to Mary and wear the scapular.

From early in their history the Carmelites were known as "Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel." The title suggests that they saw Mary not only as "mother," but also as "sister." The word "sister" is a reminder that Mary is very close to us. Through her prayers for us she can help us grow in appreciation of being sisters and brothers to one another. She leads us to a new realization that all human beings belong to the family of God. When such a conviction grows, there is hope that the human race can find its way to peace.

The **scapular** is a modified version of Mary's own garment. It symbolizes her special protection and calls the wearers to consecrate themselves to her in a special way. This does not mean that the scapular is a magic way of salvation. Rather, the scapular is a reminder of the Gospel's call to serve God's Kingdom -- a call that Mary models in a splendid way.

Wearing the Brown Scapular is not an automatic guarantee of salvation. It is not a magical charm, nor is it an excuse to live in a way contrary to the teachings of Christ and the Church. It has been approved by the Church for over seven centuries and is a sign of one's decision to follow Jesus like his mother Mary, the perfect model of all disciples of Christ.

The Brown Scapular is an expression of our belief that we will meet God in eternal life, aided by the intercession and prayer of Mary.



Pope John Paul II said this about the Brown Scapular:

Two truths are evoked by the sign of the Scapular: On the one hand, the constant protection of the Blessed Virgin, not only on life's journey, but also at the moment of passing into the fullness of eternal glory. On the other, the awareness that devotion to her cannot be limited to prayers and tributes in her honor on certain occasions, but must become a "habit", that is, a permanent orientation of one's own Christian conduct, woven of prayer and interior life, through frequent reception of the sacraments and the concrete practice of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. In this way the Scapular becomes a sign of the "covenant" and reciprocal communion between Mary and the faithful.

THE CARMELITES and SAINT SIMON STOCK

After the time of Christ, during the Byzantine era, Greek hermits lived on Mount Carmel until their way of life was ended in the 7th century by the advance of Islam under the command of the Saracens. Four hundred years later, the Crusaders succeeded in pushing the Saracens back from the coast, then around the year 1099 set up their own kingdom in the Holy Land. They made Acre, a city north of Haifa, their capital, since Jerusalem was not always secure against the attacks of the Muslims. In addition to heavy fortifications, the Crusaders built an elaborate harbor at Acre. For some 200 years, until Acre finally fell again to the Saracens (1291), this port was the gateway through which Crusaders and pilgrims alike entered and left the Holy Land.

From 1206 to 1214, St. Albert was the Patriarch of Jerusalem, but danger from the Saracens required that he make his headquarters in Acre. It was to Albert that the hermits living on Mt Carmel went to ask for a Rule of Life. For this purpose he adapted the Rule of St Augustine. It calls for a life of prayer, solitude and silence.

Despite continual difficulties, the community built a monastery and church dedicated to the Virgin Mary on Mount Carmel in 1263. The Saracens attacked and vanquished the community in 1291. The monks were killed and the convent burned. The spread of the Carmelites in Europe is largely due to the life and influence of Saint Simon Stock (1247-65).

It is believed that Simon Stock was born in Aylesford, Kent (England) around the year 1165. In 1212, he joined the Carmelites. After he was admitted into the order, he was sent to Oxford to complete his studies. Appointed vicar general, Simon went to Rome in 1226 and obtained from Pope Honorius III the approval of the Carmelite Rule. He went to Palestine for six years and assisted in the general chapter of the order in 1237. At this chapter it was determined that the majority of the Order should go to Europe, due to conflicts with the Saracens in Palestine. Many were sent to England in 1240. In 1245, during a general chapter in Aylesford, Simon was chosen as the sixth Superior General of the order.



Amid the many persecutions raised against the Order of Mount Carmel, Simon turned with confidence to the Blessed Mother of God. As he knelt in prayer on 16 July 1251, in the White Friars' convent at Cambridge, she appeared before him and presented him with the well-known brown scapular, a loose sleeveless garment destined for the Order of Carmel, reaching from the shoulders to the knees. It was an assurance, for all who died wearing it, of her heavenly assistance at the moment of death.

Simon was the Superior General of the Carmelites for twenty years and died at the Carmelite house in Bordeaux, France on 16 May 1265, at the age of one hundred. He was buried in the cathedral of Bordeaux. His remains were translated from France to England in July 1951.

Among the best known Carmelites today are two women: Saint Theresa of Jesus (*Theresa of Avila, 1515-1582*) who despite many difficulties reformed the Carmelite Order (the Discalced Carmelites); and Saint Edith Stein (*Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, 1891-1942*), a Jewish convert and philosophy professor, who was killed at Auschwitz, canonized in 1998, and proclaimed "co-patroness" of Europe in 1999.