

The Five Scapulars

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THE FIVE CAPULARS

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RAYMOND J. MILLER, C.S.S.R.

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This is a summarized account of the five scapulars, usually worn as a unit, and of the promises made to those who wear these scapulars.

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THE FIVE SCAPULARS

RAYMOND J. MILLER, C.S.S.R.

Red — white — blue — black — brown: these are the *five scapulars*, five little pieces of wool, each about an inch square, worn by Catholics as an act of devotion to the Mother of God.

With one exception, they are small-scale copies of the religious garb worn by monks and nuns of various religious orders. Wearing them signifies an intention on the part of the wearer to share, as far as he can, in the life of the monks or nuns of these orders: their prayers, works, merits; their influence with God; and the benefits that God or Our Lady have promised from heaven to confer upon those who would be faithful in wearing that particular religious garb.

The one exception is the red scapular; this one was revealed from heaven by Our Lord precisely as a small scapular; it not derived from any larger religious garb.)

And it is true that each of the five scapulars is traced back to a revelation from heaven; although the revealing covered an immense period of time. It was six and a half centuries, to be exact. The first revelation, about the white scapular occurred in the year 1190; and the last one, about the red, was made in 1840.

Here are the stories of those revelations.

St. John of Matha, a Spaniard, was saying his first holy Mass in 1190 when he saw over the altar the figure of an angel wearing a white robe, with a blue and red cross on the breast and the shoulder. St. John was given to understand that this was the kind of religious garb, or *habit*, that the Lord wished to be worn by the members of the new religious order that John was about to found. It was to be called the Order of the Most

Holy Trinity, and was to be dedicated to the work of redeeming Christians who had been captured by the Turks of northern Africa and reduced to slavery.

In 1198 St. John and his first companions had applied to Pope Innocent III for papal approval of their new order. While he was debating the matter, he too had a vision of the angel in the white robe with the red and blue cross, and hereupon did grant the approval. Such is the story related in the Roman breviary of the origin of the Trinitarian Order, and incidentally of its scapular, the *white* scapular. And beyond a doubt the order and its work turned out to be worthy of the approval of heaven and the Church. During the three centuries from 1200 to 1500, there were some *ninety thousand Christians* rescued by its means from behind the iron curtain of those days.

Next in order of time to be revealed from heaven was the black scapular of the Sorrowful Mother, or of the Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the year 1240 there were seven men, prominent citizens of Florence in central Italy, who had gathered together regularly and bound themselves by vow to honor the Mother of God in her sorrows. One evening while they were in their prayers, she appeared to them holding some black garments in her hand. "Behold," she said, "the manner of the garments with which I wish you to be clothed. These garments shall be to you a perpetual memory of the sufferings of my heart."

Following upon this vision, the seven holy men founded the Order of the Servants of Mary, or the Servites. It is well known in the United States as the order which promotes the novena devotions in honor of the Sorrowful Mother, held in many churches every Friday night. The small black scapular of the Sorrowful Mother derives its origin from this vision of the Mother of God. In fact, there is evidence to show that historically this black scapular was the first of all the five

small scapulars to be adopted and worn by lay people.

Next came the brown scapular in 1251 and 1322. The Roman breviary relates that Our Lady appeared to St. Simon Stock, an Englishman who was superior-general of the Carmelite Order, in Cambridge, England, in the year 1251. Holding in her hands the brown habit of the Carmelites, she made this promise: "Whoever dies in this habit shall not suffer everlasting fire."

In 1322 Pope John XXII issued a papal document in which he declared that Our Lady had appeared to him also and made this promise in regard to those who wear the brown Carmelite habit and fulfill certain other conditions: "I, the Mother of Grace, shall descend on the Saturday after their death. *and whomsoever I find in purgatory I shall free*, so that I may lead them to the holy mountain of life everlasting."

This extraordinary promise has come to be known as the *Sabbatine Privilege* (in Latin, *Sabbatum* means Saturday).

We shall have more to say about it when we come to speak of the benefits and the obligations connected with the wearing of the scapulars. Here we mention only that it is universally accepted in Catholic lands that this Sabbatine promise of Our Lady applies not only to actual members of the Carmelite Order, but it is connected also with the wearing of the small *brown* scapular, by any and all Christians.

Several centuries elapsed before heaven spoke again to reveal one of the five scapulars. This time it was in the year 1605, in the city of Naples, to a holy nun by the name of Sister Ursula Benincasa. Our Lord Himself appeared to her and made great promises if she and her fellow-nuns would adopt as their religious habit one of a light blue color in honor of the Immaculate Conception of His Mother. Sister Ursula then asked Him if He would grant similar favors to those of the laity or of other religious orders who would wear in honor of the Immaculate Conception a small *blue* scapular; and Our Lord did so promise.

Several centuries passed again, and we come to the year 1846, to the city of Troyes in France, and to Sister Appoline Andriveau, of the Sisters of Charity. In that year Our Blessed Lord appeared to her, showing her the *red* scapular of the Passion, promising that whoever would wear it would receive a great increase of faith, hope and charity on every Friday. This vision was several times repeated; and the extraordinary thing about it is the rapidity with which it was approved in Rome. The visions occurred in 1846; and the very next year, 1847, Pope Pius IX approved it and enriched it with many indulgences. So prompt an action on the part of Holy Mother Church in a matter of this kind hardly has a parallel.

Such was the origin of each of the five scapulars. According to the accounts, each of them was revealed directly from heaven. The custom of wearing the small scapulars as a kind of small-scale copy of the original habit, it is true, did not come into practice until about the year 1600. By their connection with the orig-

inals, however, they too may be said to have come at least indirectly from heaven.

But the stories of these heavenly visions are not the only reasons, nor indeed even the main one, for their importance and power in Catholic life. It is the approval of the Church which gives them their real value, and gives them the blessing of heaven more certainly and dependably than all the stories of revelations from on high.

Now the Church has approved each one of the five scapulars independently by itself: the red, white, blue, black and brown. And we might mention here that the Church has also approved many other scapulars besides our five. There are also those of the third orders of St. Francis and of St. Dominic; those of Our Lady of Good Counsel, of St. Joseph, of St. Benedict, of the Precious Blood, of the Sacred Heart, and the black scapular of the Passion; also the green scapular of Our Lady and a number of others; about twenty in all.

Our own five scapulars however, have

one very special distinction; they have been approved not only each by itself, but also all together. The five scapulars are one single devotion, approved as such by the Church.

In Europe about the beginning of the present century they were often called *The Redemptorist Scapulars*, for the Redemptorist Fathers on their missions always preached (as they still do) the devotion of the five scapulars, and had received power from Pope Leo XIII in the year 1886 to enroll the faithful in them. Even as far back as St. Alphonsus' time, in the 1700's, Redemptorists had the faculties from the pope to enroll in four of the five: the white, black, brown and blue. And when the red scapular was revealed to Sister Appoline in 1846, and Pope Pius approved it in 1847, it was not long before people began asking for that scapular as well as the four from olden times; and it was this popular demand that gave rise, in the providence of God, to the devotion of the five scapulars.

So much for the origin and approval

of the five scapulars; now for their *benefits*.

The main one is that the wearer enjoys some special protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even though not all the five are scapulars of Our Lady, yet in Catholic tradition they have come to be taken as a special sign of devotion to her. As such, St. Alphonsus recommends the wearing of the scapular in a list of *Devotions to Mary* he gives in his classic *Glories of Mary*; and states that he himself was enrolled in the four: white, black, brown and blue (in his time the red had not yet been revealed).

Another benefit is the company which the five scapulars bring us into. The wearer is affiliated somehow with *three* religious orders, and *four* confraternities. The three orders are: the Trinitarians for the white scapular; the Servites, for the black; and the Carmelites for the brown. The four confraternities of which the wearer becomes a member by being enrolled in the five scapulars are: of the Most Holy Trinity, for the white; of the

Sorrowful Mother, for the black; of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, for the brown; and of the Immaculate Conception, for the blue. The last named is of comparatively recent origin: Pope Leo XIII established the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception on September 18, 1894.

And note again that the *red* scapular is not derived from any religious garb, and has no confraternity. It is a Catholic *devotion*. It does not make a wearer a member of any spiritual organization, but it has its own benefits and obligations.

Indulgences are often spoken of as one of the great benefits of the five scapulars, but it must be said that at the present time they are not so extremely numerous. Perhaps there are three or four plenary indulgences every month, to be gained usually by receiving the sacraments and saying an *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, and *Glory be* for the intentions of the Holy Father. The red scapular carries with it the privileges of gaining a plenary indulgence every Friday if one

meditates for at least a quarter of an hour on the Passion of Our Lord. This should not be too difficult for persons who make a daily meditation. They could make for that day on the Passion.

THE SCAPULAR PROMISES

What are the *promises* that heaven has made for wearing the five scapulars? Implicitly, there is a very real promise with each of them. When our Lord or His mother appeared with the individual religious habits, they were as much as saying: "Wear this for Me, and I will love you."

Explicitly, however, not every one of the five has a specific promise. There is none (at least as far as this writer has found) in so many words for the white or for the black. For the blue, our Lord promised "great favors" for the wearers "and *others*," no doubt for those near and dear to the wearers; He also seems to have promised special power to their prayers for the conversion of sinners. For the red, He promised "a great increase of faith, hope and charity on every Friday."

The promises of the brown scapular of Mount Carmel are the most famous.

To St. Simon Stock, the Blessed Virgin promised that its wearers would escape hell; to Pope John XXII she promised that she would free them from purgatory on the Saturday after their death. This latter *Sabbatine* promise has been the object of a vast amount of controversy. The main point of the controversy was settled by the Church many years ago when Pope Paul V issued a decree on January 20, 1613:

“It is lawful for the Carmelites to preach that the faithful may piously believe in the assistance promised to the brethren themselves and also to the members of the Confraternity of Mount Carmel, namely, that the Blessed Virgin will assist by her continual intercession, suffrages and merits, and also by her special protection, particularly on the Saturday after their death, the souls of those brethren and members of the Confraternity who depart this life in charity and whilst living on earth have worn the habit, observed chastity according to their state in life, etc.”

We shall discuss the other conditions when speaking of the *obligations* of the brown scapular.

Besides *getting* things for wearing the scapular, however, we are also empowered to *do* things. The scapular is not a good luck charm. The wearer is not supposed to be completely passive about it. Rather, it is to inspire him to do things for God and for souls. This is one of the benefits.

Wearing the white scapular is a way of sharing in the works, merits and power of the Trinitarian Fathers, who saved 10,000 Christian slaves from behind the iron curtain of days gone by. The modern wearer of the white scapular and member of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity, is sharing in those merits; is drawing upon them in his own prayers and good works in the work of bringing relief and perhaps even deliverance to the thousands of slaves behind the iron curtain of our own day.

Similarly, the wearing of the black scapular in honor of the Mother of Sor-

rows is a good work calculated to bring down the favor of that Mother on all the mothers and all the loved ones bereaved by war or persecution or exile in our own day.

Our Lady of Fatima revealed to the children that devotion to her Immaculate Heart is the way to world peace and the conversion of Russia. The blue scapular of the Immaculate Conception offers a way of practicing that devotion; also the red, which, besides being the scapular of the Passion, is also that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And in her final great apparition at Fatima, Mary took the appearance of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, according to the account of the children.

Now for the *obligations* of the five scapulars: what must the scapulars themselves be made of? what about the enrolling and the wearing (with something about the *scapular medal*)? and the prayers or devotions that have to be performed?

The scapulars must be of *wool*; there must be two sets of the five, joined with red strings. They must be worn around the neck, one set on the breast, the other on the back. It is *not* required that the red cord be attached to each of the five scapulars. They may be wrapped in cellophane or other transparent material, as long as the blue and red cross on the white scapular remains visible.

In particular, the requirements for the *white* scapular are that it have a blue and red cross sewed onto the *front* piece of the two parts of the scapular. On the back piece, there need be nothing; and sometimes it is reduced to half size. For the cross, the up and down beam must be *red*, and the one across must be the *blue*. The white scapular must be the first or last among the five, for the reason that the cross upon it must be visible.

There is no special legislation about the make-up of the black, blue and brown scapulars, except that they must be woolen. They may have an image of the Blessed Virgin upon them, but this is not

necessary. The scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel may also be colored black instead of brown; though among the five it will always be brown to distinguish from the black one of the Sorrowful Mother.

The red, however, is very special. On one of the two pieces it must have an image of our Lord on the cross with the prayer: "Holy Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, save us!" On the other piece there must be an image of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, with the prayer: "Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, protect us!"

In order to share in the benefits of the five scapulars, two things are always essential: 1) one must be *enrolled* in each of them by a priest having the power, and 2) one must *wear* the scapulars (or the scapular medal).

About the enrolling: most priests nowadays have the power to enroll, or can obtain it fairly easily. Many priests have also the power to enroll in the scapulars *under a single formula*. This means that instead of having to place the five scapulars

ulars upon the person's shoulders five times, as they would otherwise have to do, a single imposing of the five will suffice, when accompanied of course with the proper prayers.

This is the manner of the enrolling when there is a large crowd to be enrolled: (There is no problem if it is only one or two.)

The priest having the proper faculties can use a single scapular to enroll them all. And it need not be a scapular belonging to anyone of the persons to be enrolled.

- 1) The priest blesses the scapular. If it is blessed already, that is, if he has used it before in an enrolling ceremony, he may omit the blessing.
- 2) Next, *before* imposing it upon anyone (not after), he recites the enrolling words: "Receive the habit of the Most Blessed Trinity . . ."
"Receive the scapular of the Passion of Our Lord . . ." etc.

3) Then he does the actual imposition by laying it for a moment on the shoulder (it need not be around the neck) of each person; and leaves it lying on the shoulder of the last one.

4) Finally he says the concluding prayers.

Some priests have a special privilege. If there are more than twenty persons to be enrolled, and each has his own scapular, they can impose it upon themselves at the proper time in the ceremony. But this will not usually be the case; most persons nowadays have not the scapular but the scapular medal.

Afterwards the name of each person enrolled must be taken down and sent in to some church where one of the four confraternities is established: of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Sorrowful Mother of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and of the Immaculate Conception. Redemptorists, however, are privileged to enroll in the scapulars *without* the obligation of sending in the names.

As to the actual *wearing* of the scapulars, they must be worn around the neck or carried on the person. If a scapular is lost or worn out, all that is necessary is to procure another one and put it on; no new blessing is required. If a person once enrolled has completely given up wearing it, but now wishes to take up the practice again, all he needs to do is to get a new one and put it on. No new blessing or enrolling is required. This is the case with the scapulars themselves. But if one procures a new medal, the medal must always be blessed.

And that brings us to the scapular medal. In 1910 Pope Pius X granted the privilege of wearing the scapular medal instead of the scapulars, declaring that thereby the wearer shared in all the blessings and benefits of the scapulars for which the medal had been blessed, "not excluding," he says with emphasis, "the Sabbatine privilege."

But note these things about the scapular medal:

- 1) The first enrolling must be in the

scapular, not in the medal, except for persons in the armed forces, who may be enrolled directly with the medal.

2) The medal supplies for any and all scapulars *for which it is blessed*; that is, if the priest had faculties to enroll the five scapulars, and blessed the medal properly, it carries all the privileges of the five. If he blesses it for still others, it carries their privileges too.

3) The priest in blessing the medal need only make the sign of the cross over the medal for each scapular. He need say no words; but he must keep each scapular distinct in his mind as he blesses. He can do so by repeating with each sign of the cross: "Red — White — Blue — etc."

4) How does a scapular medal look? It must have on one side an image of our Lady, any accepted representation of her whatever; and on the other, the image of our Lord *with His Heart showing*.

5) The scapular medal need not be worn around the neck, but may be carried

ried anywhere on the person, or sewed in the clothes, (for example, in a bathing suit).

We now come finally to the prayers that have to be said or good works done in order to gain the benefits of the scapulars.

For four of them, namely all but the brown, there is *nothing* imposed as of obligation. It is the *brown* scapular that has the special obligations. Not as regards our Lady's promise to St. Simon Stock, about saving the wearers from hell; that requires only the faithful wearing of the scapular. But to gain the Sabbatine privilege; to make sure of being freed from purgatory on the Saturday after our death (if not sooner); there we do have something special to do.

The decree of Pope Paul V of January 20, 1613, which was partially quoted above, goes on to list these obligations of the Sabbatine privilege. It declares that we may believe that the Blessed Virgin will bring special help: especially on the Saturday after their death to the souls

of those brethren and those members of the confraternity who depart this life in charity and who, whilst living, have worn the habit, observed chastity according to their state, and who shall have recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or, if they cannot read, shall have observed the fasts of the Church and shall have abstained from flesh meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays (unless the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord falls on that day).

Note that, besides wearing the brocade scapular, this decree imposes *two* obligations, with a *substitute* offered for the second.

The first obligation is that of "chastity according to one's state." This does not mean that the wearer of the brocade scapular may not get married, but that whether married or single he must strive to avoid sins against chastity, and if he should fall into sin, must be prompt to repent.

The second is "reciting the little office of the Blessed Virgin." This is a very ancient Catholic devotion, consist-

ng of a collection of hymns and psalms and prayers in honor of our Lady, modeled on the divine office which priests say every day; a kind of abbreviated breviary in honor of Mary. It must be said every day to gain the scapular promise. Those bound to say the regular divine office fulfill the obligation by that very exercise. Sisters who recite the new short breviary in English (as many are doing nowadays) would also seem to be fulfilling this obligation; at least, any priest who has faculties to enroll in the brown scapular can commute the obligation of the little office into this English office for them.

The substitute for the second obligation in Paul V's decree is to "observe the fasts of the Church and abstain on Wednesdays and Saturdays." But very often in modern life even this substitute is practically impossible. So the Church, like a solicitous mother, has gone on to offer a substitute for the substitute. She has granted to every priest who has faculties to enroll in the brown scapular, the

power to change or commute this fasting and abstaining into the performance of certain good works or the recitation of certain prayers. Good works would be periodic almsgiving; regular contributions to the missions; hearing Mass on weekdays; kissing the brown scapular daily with the prayer: "Our Lady of Mount Carmel, pray for us!" As to the prayers to be recited, various suggestions are made by writers on the subject. Some say it should be seven *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys* every day; some would bring it down as low as one *Our Father*, one *Hail Mary*, and one *Glory be*, every day. The exact prayers will depend on the judgment of the priest who does the commuting.

This, then, is the devotion of the five scapulars. In one way it seems easy, considering the magnitude of the benefits it offers. But to be faithful throughout life in a conscious and deliberate way, to the easy exercise of wearing the little scapulars and fulfilling the other obligations is no little thing, and will surely bring

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