



The Carmelite Brown Scapular

Signs in ordinary life

The world in which we live is full of material things which have symbolic meaning: light, fire, water, national food and delicacies, flags, uniforms, and so on. There are also, in everyday life, experiences between human beings, which express and symbolise deeper realities such as sharing a meal (as a sign of friendship), giving and wearing rings (as a sign of commitment). Such signs and symbols help us understand what is happening, our shared history, where we have come from, and give us an awareness of who we are, as individuals and as groups.

Signs in Christian life

Jesus is the great sign and gift of the Father's love. He founded the Church as a sign and instrument of his love. Christian life also has its signs. In the Eucharist and the other sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, the Sacrament of the Sick) the symbols, (water, oil, the laying on of hands, and the exchange of vows and rings), all have their own meaning and bring us into communication with God, present in each of them.

As well as liturgical signs, the Church has other signs, called sacramentals, related to some event, to some group, or saint. One of these is the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

The Scapular is a sign of Mary

The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is a sign approved by the Church as a sign of love for Mary, of the trust her children have in her, and of commitment to live like her.

The word scapular indicates a monastic apron worn over the shoulders when monks, friars or nuns were working in the kitchen or garden. In time, people gave it symbolic meaning: it could be the cross to be borne every day as disciples and followers of Christ

In some religious orders the Scapular became a sign of their way of life. The Brown Scapular came to symbolise the special dedication of Carmelites to Mary, the Mother of God, and to express trust in her motherly protection as well as a desire to be like her in her commitment to Christ and to others. Among the Carmelites, a smaller version of the Scapular was accepted as the sign of lay people belonging to the Order and of commitment to its spirituality and mission.

The value and meaning of the Scapular

The Brown Scapular in the Carmelite tradition is a sign of Mary's motherly protection. It's spiritual meaning has been approved by the Church. It stands for a commitment to follow Jesus, as did Mary, the perfect model of all the disciples of Christ. This commitment has its origin in Baptism when by water and the Holy Spirit we become children of God.

The Blessed Virgin teaches us:

- to be open to God, and to his will as revealed to us in the people, circumstances and events of our lives; to listen to the Word of God in the bible and in life, to believe in it and to live by it;
- to pray always, aware of the presence of God in all that is happening around us;
- to be involved with people on the margins, being attentive to their needs.

The Scapular leads us into communion with the wider community of Carmel, both religious and lay. It calls on us to live prayerfully in intimate friendship with God. It reminds us of the example of the great saints of Carmel, Sts Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Therese of Lisieux, with whom we are brothers and sisters. We hope to meet God in eternal life, aided by the intercession and prayer of Mary and all the Carmelite saints.

Some practical rules

People are enrolled in the Scapular only once, by a priest or any authorised person. The Scapular can be replaced afterwards by a medal which has on one side the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and on the other the image of Mary.

The Scapular holds us to live as authentic Christians in line with the teaching of the Gospel, to receive the sacraments, to profess our special friendship for Mary, which should be expressed, for example by daily praying the Hail Mary, prayerful reading of the Scriptures and service to someone in need.

The Carmelite Scapular is a sign

- of the commitment to follow Jesus as Mary did,
- to be open to God's Word in Scripture and life and to do God's will,
- to be guided by humble faith, trusting hope and divine love,
- to be close to people in need,
- to pray always,
- to be aware of the presence God in our lives,
- to bring people to the family of Carmel,
- with Mary's help, to strengthen our desire to be with God forever.

It is not

- a magical charm to protect you,
- an automatic guarantee of salvation,
- an excuse for not living up to the demands of Christian life.

Summary

The Brown Scapular is a sign of consecration to Our Lady and her way of life – a life in allegiance to Jesus Christ. By wearing the Brown Scapular, we enter into a covenant of love and trust with Mary, our Mother, and our Sister in faith.

The Carmelite Scapular is a sign of Mary's motherly protection. It has a centuries old spiritual meaning approved by the Church. It stands for a commitment to follow Jesus, like Mary, the perfect model of all the disciples of Christ. This commitment has its origin in Baptism when by water and the Holy Spirit we become children of God and members of the Church.

It unites us to the 800-year-old family of Carmel. It is an expression of our belief that we will meet God in eternal life aided by the intercession and prayer of Mary and all the saints. It is a sign of Mary's protection and of our belonging to the family of Carmel. Secure in God's love we joyfully accept the Lord's invitation to serve him by responding to the needs of others.