

— From The Pastor's Desk —

One important feast day in the summer is this Thursday, July 16th, Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Many churches have been named for the Blessed Mother under this title. It refers to the mountain in Israel where the prophet Elijah defeated 450 prophets of Baal in the contest over whose god was greater (1 Kings 18). Later in about the 12th century hermits gathered on Mt. Carmel to dedicate their lives to God in the example of Elijah. They came to be known as Carmelites and spread to England, where a man named Simon Stock joined them, later becoming head of the order. Tradition says that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to St. Simon Stock, the superior of the order, in 1254 and gave him the brown scapular as a sacramental in which to devote themselves to her and Jesus with greater fervor.

Later, as the Carmelites went through a period of decreased fervor, they were renewed and reformed by the great saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross during the tumultuous 16th century in Europe, seeking to return the Carmelite order to its original roots of simplicity, austerity, and intense prayer. Saint Therese of Lisieux, our patroness, was also a great example of holiness who joined the reformed Carmelites of Teresa of Avila. All three of these great Carmelites are now doctors of the Church.

A particular beautiful tradition in the Church is the devotion to the brown scapular. The scapular is a brown cloth that is considered a "miniature" of the Carmelite brown habit. Associated with being invested with this scapular is the promise of the Virgin Mary to Simon Stock in an apparition that "whosoever dies wearing the scapular shall not suffer eternal fire." This of course must be understood not as a magic charm in any way, but only in the Catholic understanding that it is a particular sign of consecration to the Virgin Mary who will assist wearers with even more prayers as a response to their devotion. In turn, when one wears the scapular with devotion one will receive great assistance from the Blessed Mother at the hour of death. One fascinating note is that on October 13th, 1917 at Fatima, during the Great Miracle of the spinning of the sun, the three children witnessed several visions of the Virgin Mary, including as Our Lady of Mount Carmel with the baby Jesus and holding the Brown Scapular.

It is a devotion that can bring so many closer to Our Lord and Lady, as well as greater devotion to St. Therese! We have been investing our CCD eighth grade students in the brown scapular for the past 10 years, and we have had several investitures in our Sons of St. Joseph. We also had the late Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, who had a regular show on EWTN, come to St. Theresa's and formally invest many people in the Brown Scapular. If you have not been invested with the brown scapular, ask one of the parish priests. Bring a scapular and the prayers can be said in a brief moment, while bringing greater graces to one's life. For children, it becomes a sign of the Virgin Mary's constant care, love and prayer from them every day. It becomes an invitation to love the woman who brought Jesus to us, and the Creator who gave us a heavenly mother for all eternity.

God love you,
Fr. Brian Gannon