

CLIFF NOTES

by Fr. Clifford Smith

What is a Scapular?

A scapular (*From the Latin, scapula, or shoulder*) is a Roman Catholic devotional artifact in the form of a cloth pendant, the wearing of which is believed by the faithful to confer a benefit to the wearer. The Church considers it sacramental. It can also refer to the article of monastic clerical dress from which it evolved.

The scapular was originally part of the habit of many monastic men and women that some orders still wear today. It is a shoulder-wide length of cloth with a neck-opening in the middle, worn over the traditional robe. The modern form of the scapular worn by the laity is much smaller, designed to be unobtrusive, worn under regular clothing. It consists of two small squares of cloth, or laminated paper bearing religious images joined by two ribbons. It is worn so that one square rests on the chest and the other on the back.

Scapulars are devotional objects designed to show one's pledge to a confraternity, a saint, or a way of life; as well as serving the wearer as a constant reminder of that vow. Many scapulae bear verses from scripture as well. Through the history of their use, scapulae have been variously called *jugum Christi* ("yoke of Christ") or *scutum* ("shield"), calling to mind various scripture passages. Many types of scapulars promise benefits or indulgences to those who wear them faithfully.

Today at least seventeen scapulars are recognized by the Church including the traditional Green and Brown Scapulars: **The Brown Scapular** represents a special dedication by Carmelites to Mary, the Mother of God, and to express trust in her motherly protection as well as the desire to be like her in her commitment to Christ. To wear the brown scapular is to trust in Our Lady who has great power of intercession before her Son. Our Lady gave this promise of salvation to all those in the Family of Carmel. One must be enrolled by a priest to obtain this promise.

The Green Scapular emphasized the theme of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Pope Pius IX strongly recommended its promotion and use. Among its promises: Conversion of those who do not have the faith; Reconciliation to the Church for those who have lost/strayed from the faith; Assurance of a happy death; Strengthening of the faith for those already in the Church; and Protection from Satan for those who wear or promote the scapular.

A few scapulars are associated with confraternities or orders, but most are devotional only, such as the Scapular of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Also recognized are the Maximilian Kolbe Scapular, Our Lady of Guadalupe Scapular, Padre Pio Scapular, Red Passion Scapular, St. Joseph Scapular, St. Michael Scapular, St. Therese of Lisieux Scapular, St. Jude Scapular, the Trinity White Scapular, the Merced Scapular, Scapular of 'Help of the Sick', White Scapular of the Immaculate Heart and Scapular of Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Rules for use of Scapulars

Though each scapular has its own particular qualifications and usage, the Church has set down certain rules that pertain to all types. A scapular must be in good repair with both ribbons and bands intact. Multiple scapulars can be worn on the same bands, but the bands must be the color of those prescribed by the scapular with the most preeminence, and that scapular must be in front with the others behind in order of precedence.

A scapular associated with a confraternity must be invested by an ordained representative of that group. A scapular associated with a mystery or devotion may simply be blessed by a priest and given to the wearer. To receive the benefits or indulgences granted the scapular generally must be worn constantly. It may be placed aside for a time but during that period, the wearer does not receive the scapular's benefits. Should the wearer begin wearing it again, the benefits are again conferred. It can be removed for showering or swimming.

If a scapular becomes damaged to the point where it is no longer in good repair, it must be replaced. However, it is not necessary for the wearer to be reinvested as it is the devotion of the wearer, not the object itself that confers the benefit of the scapular.