

### **THE BROWN SCAPULAR – PART I**

In the year 1251 a most momentous vision took place. St. Simon Stock, the Prior of the Carmelites, newly transplanted in England, prayed earnestly to Our Lady for help. Then: “To him appeared the Blessed Virgin with a multitude of angels, hold the Scapular of the Order in Her blessed hands, saying: “This will be a privilege for you and for all Carmelites, that he who dies in this will not suffer eternal fire.””

The above is taken from an early Carmelite Catalog of Saints. Since the vision is a part of private revelations, we need to investigate, for there are two kinds of revelation, public and private. Public revelation is that which is found in Scripture and Tradition; it was complete, closed when the last Apostle died and the New Testament was finished. There is to be no new public revelation until His glorious return at the end of the world.

All other revelations are called private. It’s really not a good term, because we use that term even for Fatima, which is addressed to the whole world. However, since the term is usual, I will use it now.

A great difference exists between public and private revelation. In public revelation, the Church has the promise of divine protection in teaching, such as that found in St. Luke’s Gospel 10:16, “He who hears you, hears me.” But for private revelations, the Church does not have such a commission. As a result, it is important for us to explore the evidence for the historicity of this vision given to St. Simon Stock. However, even though the matter is private, not public revelation, we will soon find that not only is the historical evidence for it very good, but we have a different kind of assurance even stemming from the area of public revelation. First, let’s look at the history of the vision.

There are several different forms of the Carmelite Catalog of the Saints. The oldest copy comes from the late 1300’s. Pope Boniface VIII issued a Constitution in favor of the Carmelites in 1298, so it seems that the text goes back to within 50 years of the vision. This is really remarkable. But there is more. Around the year 1291, William of Sanvico, a Carmelite in the Holy Land, recorded that at that time the Order was in great difficulties in England, and the Blessed Virgin appeared to the Prior and told him to go to Pope Innocent IV for help. Now since Sanvico gives no details of the vision, this very fact helps to show his testimony is independent of the catalogs. Yet he does agree with the catalogs of saints in reporting a vision as taking place at precisely the right time and in the right circumstances.

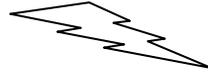
There are many pieces of evidence regarding the vision of Our Lady and the Scapular. Let me state just one more. The Church actually has the minutes of the meetings of a Carmelite Confraternity for laymen in Florence, from August 22, 1280 to Nov. 1, 1298. It states that men seeking reconciliation with the Confraternity were wearing capuches – and we know the Scapular was once called a capuche. Another entry in the minutes seems to be an allusion to the great promise. It says that the members met “to render glory to God and to His glorious Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, that she may grant and give us the grace that we may be able to persevere in good and to come to a truly good end.”

Building on that, many Saints and scholars have shown remarkable esteem for the Brown Scapular. I will mention one. St. John Bosco, who died in 1888, was buried in the Scapular. When his body was exhumed in 1929 the Scapular was found intact beneath the rotted garments, for the rest of his clothing had decayed.

Does this sound difficult to you? It is not really difficult. I regret that I had to include so much data, but my purpose is to show that the historical evidence that the Scapular vision really took place is very solid. And it is solid. Now allow me to get to something easier and more satisfactory.

The great Pope Pius XII wrote a letter to the major superiors of the Carmelites, to celebrate the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the vision. Among other things he said: “There is no one who is not aware how greatly a love for the Blessed Virgin Mother of God contributes to the enlivening of the Catholic faith...In the *first rank* of the most favored of these devotions that of the Holy Carmelite Scapular must be placed.” This is indeed a very high recommendation. The Pope continued: “Therefore it has pleased us greatly to learn of the decision of our Carmelite brethren...to take all pains to pay homage to the Blessed Virgin Mary in as solemn a manner as possible on the occasion of the Seventh centenary of the Institution of the Scapular.

Ordinarily, when Popes make mention of any private vision or revelation, they will inject some qualifying expression such as, “it is said” or similar things. This is to show that he is speaking of something from private revelations. Yet Pius XII did not add any such qualifier to this letter! Instead he said, “Most willingly do we commend do pious an undertaking...For not with a light or passing matter are we here concerned but with the obtaining of eternal life itself which is the substance of the Promise of the Most Blessed Virgin which has been handed down to us.” Remarkable words. What must we do to gain so great a Promise? Stay tuned for Part II next week. God bless you.



## THE BROWN SCAPULAR – PART II

What are the conditions necessary to gain the great promise of the Scapular?

First of all, the vision spoke of this a privilege for “all Carmelites.” So it is necessary to be in some way affiliated with the Order of Carmel. For most Catholics, this is accomplished through enrollment in the Confraternity of the Scapular. Formerly, this was commonly done at the time of First Communion. Sadly, today many churches ignore it. So if one is not sure that he or she has had this done, it is important to check, and if certitude cannot be had, the pastor can provide a conditional enrollment.

But is there anything else required? Not a few Catholics – including some who should know better – insist that She should know what the requirements are. That Our Lady mentioned nothing other than wearing the Scapular at the time of death. So according to some, we must not add anything else.

Again, Pius XII helps us. In the same letter which I mentioned in Part I he also wrote: “But not for this reason, however, may they who wear the Scapular think that they can attain eternal salvation while remaining sinful and negligent of spirit, for the Apostle warns us: ‘In fear and trembling shall you work out your salvation.’”

Pius XII helped much at this point: “Finally may it be to them a Sign of their consecration to the Most Sacred Heart of the Immaculate Virgin, which in recent times we have so strongly recommended.”

If one follows that recommendation, there is no need to measure: he most surely has all that is needed. For a consecration, properly understood, is indeed a great act of devotion to Our Lady.

But now it is time to add something of greater importance. We have been saying that the vision of St. Simon Stock belongs to private revelation, and that the Church, strictly speaking, does not have a divine promise of guaranteeing that the vision did indeed take place. But we have something that is a greater assurance. And we do have it. We get this from the teaching of Pope Pius XI in *Explorata res* of February 2, 1923: “...nor would he incur eternal death whom the Most Blessed Virgin assists, especially at his last hour. This opinion of the Doctors of the Church, in harmony with the sentiments of the Christian people, and supported by the experience of all times, depends especially on this reason, the fact that the Sorrowful Virgin shared in the work of redemption with Jesus Christ.”

It is important to note here that we have crossed over from the area of merely private revelations into that of public revelation. There the Church does have teaching authority, and Pius XI has just told us that the protection of the Blessed Virgin will protect one from eternal death. We have similar words from Pius XII and Benedict XV.

Pius XI flatly said that, “he will not incur eternal death.” Now there is a vital question of final perseverance. Allow me to illustrate: (an old priest friend of mine, Fr. Joseph DeWATER taught me this) If I look ahead to the next time I will have temptation, and ask: Will God then give me the graces needed to win? The answer is of course: Yes. And it is yes no matter how many times I look into the future. But – and this is the critical point – to continue cooperating with these graces, not just once, but over a long period, even to death – that needs something extra and special. That something special is called the grace of final perseverance. Does God offer everyone that grace? Yes. For St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: (1 Ths. 5:23-24): “May the God of peace make you hold in all things, so that your entire spirit and soul and body may be kept without complaint at the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He who called you is faithful and He will also do it.” Similarly, he wrote in Phil 1:6: “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it, up to the day of Christ Jesus.” And in 1 Cor 1:8-9: “He will confirm you even to the end without blame, on the day of Our Lord Jesus Christ. God through whom you were called into sharing with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful.”

So we have triple assurance from St. Paul of this: God will *offer* this grace of final perseverance to everyone. How then could the Council of Trent teach that we cannot be sure of having this grace? Very easily. We watch the wording. St. Paul made clear God will offer it – but is it one thing for God to offer it, another thing for me to have it. If He offers, but I do not accept, but instead reject, I will not have it. Our final part on the Brown Scapular will be next week. God bless.