

- Hopefully many of you have begun your 33-days of preparation for consecrating (or re-consecrating) yourself to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- As I've so often repeated in the bulletin and our Friday 5 email blast, solemnly consecrating oneself to Our Lady is "the surest, easiest, shortest, and the most perfect means" to becoming a saint, according to St. Louis de Montfort.
- Truly, if we are serious about growing in holiness, if we are serious about our salvation, we mustn't treat devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as something optional. It must be an imperative for us.
- Because she is the spouse of the Holy Spirit, Who is the Sanctifier; because she is the New Eve corresponding to Jesus, the New Adam; because she is the Mediatrix of all graces, ie, the means by which we receive God's graces, Mary is indispensable in helping us get to Heaven.
- To this end, I must note that, while most churches around the world today are celebrating the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, today is also the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.
- Although this is the titular feast day of the Carmelite order, this feast has taken on a universal significance within the Church because it celebrates one of the most important Marian devotions: the brown scapular.
- While there's not much in the way of historical evidence to prove it, it's believed that Our Lady appeared to St. Simon Stock, a saintly prior general of the Carmelites, on July 16, 1251, most likely in Aylesford, England.
- When Mary appeared to St. Simon Stock, she held out to him the brown scapular, and promised that whoever would wear the scapular devoutly throughout life would be saved.
- Considering how quickly devotion to the brown scapular spread, and how it remains – even 800 years later – a primary and popular piece of Marian devotion, I think there's every reason to believe in the veracity of this Marian apparition.
- The scapular, which became a part of the Carmelite habit shortly after Our Lady's apparition to St. Simon, was eventually adapted for use by the laity, becoming two small panels of cloth joined by strings that is worn over the shoulders.
- Now, nearly 800 years later, the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel is understood to be one of the most important and esteemed forms of Marian devotion – one that yokes us to Mary, which necessarily means yoking us to Christ as well.
- Wearing the scapular is a sign of being clothed with Mary and her virtues. And as one of the panels of the scapular hangs in the middle of one's chest, it's a symbol of keeping Mary close to one's heart.
- Moreover, the scapular is a sacramental of the Church, which means it is a sacred sign that is a means for disposing one to receive and cooperate with God's graces, and thereby draw closer to Him.
- It's not magical; it's not a good luck charm. It's a symbol that the faithful may wear that points to one's love for the Blessed Virgin Mary and one's desire to serve her, to please her, and to imitate her – which, ultimately, is pleasing to our Lord!
- In fact, the Church's writings on the brown scapular state that it is a Marian habit or garment that is both a sign and a pledge. The scapular is a *sign* of belonging to Mary, and it is a *pledge* of her motherly protection – in this life and in the next.

- To wear the brown scapular properly and to receive the benefits promised, it is necessary for one to be received into the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, which consists of a brief rite of prayer conducted by a priest.
- And for all who are interested, Fr. Jones and I are offering this at 9:15 and 12:10 today.
- The requirements for being enrolled are: that one wear the scapular faithfully, that one practice chastity according to one's state in life, and that one be willing to pray *The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary* daily or pray the Rosary daily.
- When one is received into the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, it means that one is devoted to and trusts in the maternal intercession of Mary's Immaculate Heart.
- Wearing the scapular is also a sign that one desires to imitate Our Lady's virtues by cultivating within oneself most especially the virtues of humility, chastity, and charity.
- It is also piously believed by the Carmelites that anyone who dies wearing the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel will be saved from eternal damnation, and that Mary will intercede for him or her to be delivered from Purgatory.
- Of course, being received into the Confraternity and wearing the brown scapular is not a "Get Out of Jail Free" card. You have to strive to live a life of holiness and to devote yourself to Our Lady by trusting in her and imitating her. It's not for the faint of heart!
- Truly, practicing this particular devotion requires one to be attentive to the demands of the interior life through prayer. It requires that we come to resemble Mary in our hearts and souls, and not just outwardly by wearing her garment.
- Practicing the devotion of the brown scapular is an invitation to a life of recollection, of constant recourse to Mary and our Lord, of intimate union with Jesus and Mary, of becoming fully devoted to God through Mary, which is why it goes perfectly with Marian consecration.
- What the Church has learned over the centuries is that, genuine confidence in Our Lady, undergirded by heartfelt prayer to her, and illustrated by some outward form of Marian piety (like wearing the scapular), assures any sinner the grace of final perseverance.
- St. Louis de Montfort wrote: "God the Father made an assemblage of all the waters and He named it the sea (Latin: *mare*). He made an assemblage of all His graces and He called it Mary (*Maria*).... It is by her that He applies His merits to His members, and that He communicates His virtues, and distributes His graces. She is His mysterious canal; she is His aqueduct, through which He makes His mercies flow generously and abundantly."
- And this is precisely why we should entrust ourselves to Mary's maternal care. For when we do, she obtains for us every grace we need to be saved. She intercedes for us to make us holy. And she always brings us closer to her Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
- If you'd like to commit to living your life in union with Mary – to be like Mary – then be enrolled in the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and wear the brown scapular with devotion and love. As well, do the 33 days of preparation and consecrate yourself to her.
- Through the faithful wearing of the scapular and consecrating ourselves to Our Lady, may we each come to resemble her, who is our life, our sweetness, and our hope.
- Through her gracious intercession, may we all be saved from the fires of hell and led quickly to Heaven after we die.
- St. Louis de Montfort, pray for us. St. Simon Stock, pray for us. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, pray for us.