

SAINT SIMON STOCK

THE BROWN SCAPULAR OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

Flower of Carmel, blossoming vine,
Splendor of heaven, Mother divine, none like you!
Mother of meekness, peerless you are!
To the Carmelites favors impart, Star of the Sea!

By Irene Dutra

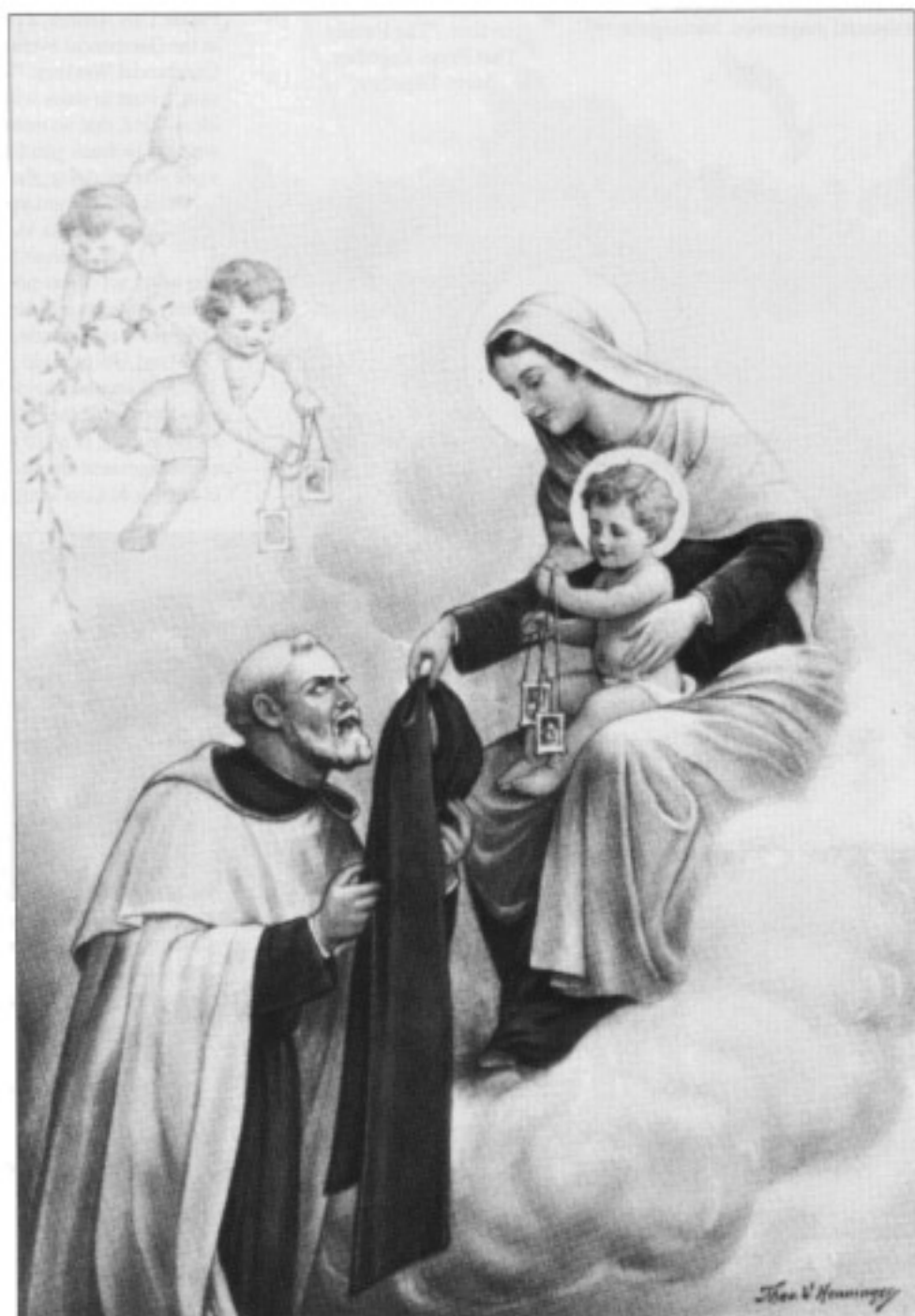
THIS BEAUTIFUL PRAYER, FLOS Carmeli (Flower of Carmel), was composed over seven hundred years ago by the English Carmelite saint, Simon Stock. His Order was going through a difficult period—dissension from within and opposition from without—and as prior general, Simon carried a crushing burden of responsibility. One night, overwhelmed by his trials, Simon—though frail and aged—spent the entire night on his knees fervently reciting Flos Carmeli over and over and imploring Our Blessed Mother for help. He begged her for the “privilegium,” that is, the protection a lord would give his vassals. During the early morning hours his cell was suddenly flooded with a great light, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel accompanied by a multitude of angels appeared, holding a scapular out to Simon and saying:

Receive, my beloved son, this scapular of your Order. This shall be to you and to all Carmelites a privilege that whosoever dies clothed in this shall never suffer eternal fire.

Old Testament Beginnings

Our Lady appeared to Simon Stock on July 16, 1251, but the scapular story has its origins in Old Testament times. The story begins on the heights of Mount Carmel, a beautiful mountain range in Palestine overlooking the Mediterranean Sea where, eight centuries before Christ, the prophet

Saint Simon Stock receiving the brown scapular from Our Lady of Mount Carmel.



THE SCAPULAR AT LOURDES, FATIMA AND GARABANDAL

Excerpted from *God Speaks at Garabandal* by Father Joseph Pelletier

Scapular and Rosary Go Together

For centuries the wearing of the scapular has been closely associated with the recitation of the rosary. These have long been considered as sister practices that go together. Children were enrolled in the scapular and given a rosary on the day of their first solemn Communion. It is not surprising then to find them both mentioned in each of the three great Marian apparitions of modern times.

At Lourdes, Our Lady appeared eighteen times to little Bernadette in 1858. Her first apparition was on February 11 and the last one was on July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. That Our Lady chose to end her visits at Lourdes on that day is not without significance. It was a silent but obvious preaching of the scapular, just as her preaching of the rosary had been silent but eloquent. Our Lady did not say a word to Bernadette during this final appearance. But she did give a message to her and to us by choosing the feast of the scapular for her last visit. This silent message was like a last testament, something that she kept until the very end because she wanted to impress us with its importance. The scapular is the symbol of Mary's love and protection and it summarized the whole purpose of her many appearances at Lourdes. Her last visit on the feast of Mount Carmel was an invitation to wear the scapular as a symbol of our placing ourselves under her protection.

At Fatima, the scapular was kept until the end also. It was the very last thing that Our Lady recommended at the conclusion of her final apparition on October 13, 1917. As the people stared in amazement at the promised miracle, the dance of the sun, Lucia witnessed a series of tableaux close to the base of the sun. The last of these was an apparition of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Our Lady had twice promised the children that she would come as Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

At Garabandal, even greater prominence was given to the scapular. It is the very title by which Our Lady chose to identify herself. On July 1, 1961, the archangel Michael, who until then had been the only one to appear at Garabandal, said to the four girls: "Tomorrow, Sunday, the Virgin Mary will appear to you as Our Lady of Mount Carmel." She did in fact appear on July 2, feast of the Visitation, "with the scapular on the right wrist." It was a brown scapular and very large. In her subsequent apparitions the Blessed Virgin usually appeared with the scapular hanging from her wrist.

Why the Feast of the Visitation?

It is legitimate to ask why Our Lady should have chosen the feast of the

Visitation for her first appearance as Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The answer could be that the scapular and the feast of the Visitation both have the same general significance. The scapular is a symbol of Mary's love and protection, of her willingness to help the children confided to her by Jesus at the foot of the cross. She showed this same love and willingness to help when she visited her cousin Elizabeth who was awaiting the miraculous birth of her child, John the Baptist.

Many Graces

Although the special grace of the brown scapular of Mount Carmel is Mary's assurance to the wearer of dying in God's friendship, innumerable cures, conversions and other graces of a spiritual nature have been obtained through this sacramental. The nineteenth century French Jesuit, Blessed Claude de la Colombiere, has well summarized the long history of this particularly efficacious sacramental when he said: "No devotion has been confirmed with miracles more numerous and more authentic."

Invitation to Wear the Scapular

In assuming the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Garabandal, and by holding out the scapular to us, as it were, by carrying it frequently at her wrist, the Blessed Virgin was telling us that it still pleases her that we wear her mantle and that she will continue to bless and protect in a special way those who do this with faith and confidence. Our Lady even seemed to be telling us something by the very size of the scapular she carried. It was unusually large, similar in size to the maniple that the priest formerly wore at Mass over his left arm. It was as though the Blessed Virgin wanted to be sure that we would not fail to notice the scapular, as though she was trying to impress us in this concrete way with the importance she attaches to it. □



The shrine of Lourdes. Our Lady's last appearance to St. Bernadette, occurred on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

“Even as a child, Simon had an intense devotion to Mary.”

Elijah was living a holy and penitential life. Elijah had prophesied a severe drought, which came to pass and lasted for three years—God’s punishment to the Jewish nation for its idolatry. At the end of that period the Lord had Elijah summon King Ahab and all the people to Mount Carmel and witness a contest between the followers of Baal, the pagan idol, and those of Yaweh. By causing a miraculous fire to come down from the heavens to consume the holocaust on the altar (something the frenzied followers of Baal had tried to do but failed), the prophet convinced King Ahab and those gathered on the mountain that Yaweh was the true God. Because the people had returned to Yaweh, Elijah prophesied to them that the drought would soon end.

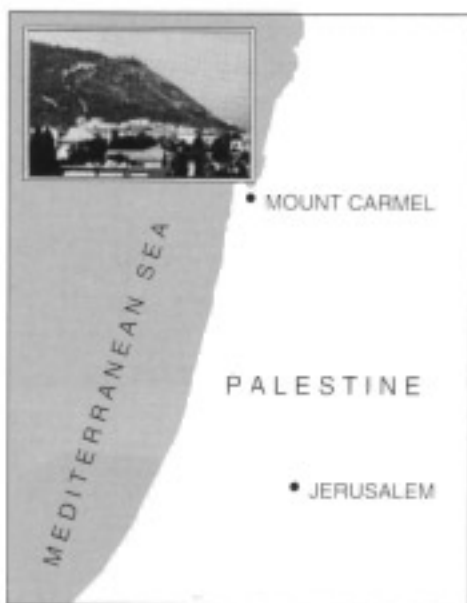
Then Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bowed down to the earth, and told his servant to go look out at the sea. Six times the servant went and six times he returned with the reply, “There is nothing.” But the seventh time he saw a small cloud rising out of the sea, and soon “the sky grew dark with cloud and storm, and rain fell in torrents” (1 Kings 18:45).

Through the intercession of Elijah, God had given his people rain. But a deeper meaning lay in the cloud rising from the sea; it signified the spiritual salvation of mankind. Many centuries later, doctors of the Church — St. Augustine and St. Ambrose, among them—would reflect that the little cloud Elijah saw rising from the sea prefigured the Immaculate Virgin, who would rise out of the sea of humankind, free of the impurity of original sin.

Between the time of Elijah and the birth of Mary—a span of over eight hundred years—the prophet’s spiritual descendants, known as the “hermits of Mount Carmel,” handed down the revelations of their founder and prayed for the coming of the Virgin. It is a beautiful coincidence of geography that Nazareth, the birthplace of the Virgin, is located on the plain at the foot of Mount Carmel and

visible from its summit.

The hermits of Mount Carmel, some traditions tell us, were present at the first Pentecost gathering and thus were among the first to accept the message of Christianity and to be baptized by the Apostles. In fact, some believe that there was an unbroken line of prophets and hermits on Mount Carmel until the thirteenth century, when the Crusaders arrived.



Inset, Mount Carmel as seen from Haifa.

Birth of the Carmelite Order

At the turn of the thirteenth century, the Crusaders came from Europe to the Holy Land to free it from Moslem hands. A few, wishing to stay on and take up an eremitic life of renunciation and prayer, settled on Mount Carmel near the so-called “spring of Elijah.” After a time these hermits organized themselves into a community, “the Brothers of St. Mary of Carmel,” and in 1210 asked St. Albert, the Latin-rite patriarch of the Holy Land, to write a Rule of life for them. The Rule, though brief, was remarkably substantial and balanced and although written with only the original community of Mount Carmel in view, has served Carmelites ever since as a framework of life. The hermits built a small oratory and named it St. Mary’s, the first chapel dedicated to the Our Blessed Mother.

The Carmelite foundation on Mount Carmel lasted only about eighty years, for as the Moslems started regaining territory in the Holy Land, most of the hermits—fearing persecution at the hands of the infidels—left their beloved mountain for Europe. (The few who chose to remain were massacred in 1291.)

St. Simon Stock

Some of the Carmelites emigrated to England and there they met a strange but holy man, Simon Stock. The similarities between Simon and Elijah were many: Simon dwelt as a hermit in an English forest, finding shelter in the hollow of a tree-trunk (hence his surname, “Stock”), just as Elijah had dwelt in Carmel’s natural caves. And just as the ravens had once fed Elijah, a small dog would bring Simon crusts of bread.

Even as a child, Simon had an intense devotion to Mary. He became a hermit while still in his teens and would spend his days composing poems about Mary and visiting her shrines. Often Our Blessed Mother appeared to him in visions. In one apparition she revealed that in a few years some holy hermits would come from Mount Carmel and that he should join their Order, which was especially devoted to her service.

Thus, when the Brothers of Carmel arrived in England, Simon joined them. He studied for the priesthood and after his ordination at the age of forty, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There he stayed for several years, living with the hermits who had remained on Mount Carmel. When Simon returned to England, he set about building up the Carmelite Order in his country.

In 1241 the Earl of Kent gave the Carmelites a home on his vast estate at Aylesford, and they began at once to build their hermitage and a church, dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady. New foundations were made in other places in England, but Aylesford remained the main Carmelite center.

At the Carmelite chapter meeting held in Aylesford in 1245, Simon Stock was elected prior general. His brothers had become aware of his sanity and leadership ability. Both were needed, for the Order was going through troubled times as it tried to adapt to changing conditions.

In resettling to Europe from the Holy Land, the Carmelites were faced with two major difficulties. The first was to establish their legitimacy as a religious order. These strange-looking men with their long, striped capes were asking permission to found monasteries, and many bishops refused their requests, some even demanding that Rome disband the Order. A second problem was that even when the refugee hermits from Mount Carmel were allowed to settle in a diocese, they had no way of supporting themselves. Clearly the hermits would have to become friars, combining their contemplative life with an active apostolate.

Simon found the task of organizing a group of contemplative hermits from the Holy Land into an order of mendicant friars in Europe almost beyond his capacities. And so one July evening in 1251, he withdrew to his monastic cell to spend the whole night in prayer, begging his Heavenly Mother to help her Carmelite children in their hour of need. And, as we know, the Virgin answered his prayers in a wonderful way, with the scapular and her promise of salvation for all those who wore her mantle with devotion.

A short time after the scapular apparition, Simon sent two of his Carmelite brothers to the Pope, who eventually took the Order under the protection of the Holy See. Simon also wrote a detailed account of Our Lady's visit and promise and sent it to all the Carmelite monasteries. Devotion to the scapular began to spread, miracles to take place. Popes and bishops, kings and queens, nobles and peasants, all wanted to be invested in the brown scapular to obtain what Our Lady had promised. A confraternity was formed to foster devotion to



Pope John XXII, one of the Avignon popes, is believed to have issued the bull in 1322 known as the "Sabbatine Privilege."

the scapular, and over the centuries, the devotion has been blessed and approved by successive popes.

The Sabbatine Privilege

Seventy years after her appearance to Simon Stock, Our Lady of Mount Carmel made a second promise related to the scapular. In 1322 she appeared to Pope John XXII in Avignon, France and urged him to take the Order of Mount Carmel under his special protection. She promised that she would assist the souls of its members in purgatory and deliver them from their sufferings on the first Saturday after death if they fulfilled certain conditions. (This is called the "Sabbatine Privilege.") Pope John XXII issued a bull in which he stated all that Our Lady had told him.

The conditions outlined for gaining the Sabbatine Privilege were the observance of chastity according to one's state in life, the wearing of the scapular with devotion, and the daily recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin (or, in our day, some substitute practice approved of by one's confessor).

St. Alphonsus Liguori, a doctor of the Church, dared to suggest that if one does "a little more" than is requested to obtain this "Sabbatine Privilege," one will not go to purgatory at all. We should note here that when the body of St. Alphonsus was exhumed forty years after his death in 1787, all else corruptible in the tomb had decomposed with the sole exception of the saint's Carmelite scapular.

Until the End of Time

Simon Stock, who lived to be nearly a hundred, died in Bordeaux, France in 1265 while making a visitation to the Carmelite foundation there. He was never formally canonized but the Holy See has granted that his feast can be kept on May 16 by the Carmelite Order and the dioceses of Birmingham, Northampton and Southwark in England. In 1951, to commemorate the seven-hundredth anniversary of the scapular apparition, relics of St. Simon Stock were brought to Aylesford, England from Bordeaux.

In the fourteenth century, when the ranks of the Carmelite Order were being decimated by the "Black Death," a plague then ravaging Europe, Our Lady appeared to a Carmelite friar, St. Peter Thomas, and assured him that the Order would survive: "Our Order of Carmel will last until the end of the world," the Blessed Mother said. "For Elijah, the first patron of the Order, asked this of my Son at the Transfiguration and obtained it."

The feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16, was instituted for the Carmelites in 1332 and extended to the universal Church in 1726.

During the past hundred and fifty years, in major apparitions—Lourdes, Fatima, and especially Garabandal—Mary has been more insistently calling attention to her scapular. It is clear that the scapular story has not yet ended; it continues to unfold in mysterious and wonderful ways.

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