



*The Carmelite Monastery on Mount Carmel, high above the Mediterranean Sea*

The Greeks believed their gods dwelt on Mount *Olympus*, and they built their sacred citadel on the Acropolis, the highest point above Athens. The Jews built their sacred temple on Mount *Zion*, the highest point in Jerusalem. Christians in the Holy Land look to Mount *Carmel*, which means “Garden of God,” a high green ridge overlooking the vast Mediterranean Sea. The Christian monks who made their home on Mount Carmel, 2000 years after Elijah offered his sacrifice to God on its heights, wore a “scapular,” a kind of apron over their shoulders. They clothed themselves in Christ, who said “take my yoke upon your shoulders, for my yoke is easy and my burden light” (Mt 11:30). They imitated the virtues of Our Lady, who bore Christ’s flesh in her body. By wearing the scapular, devotion to Our Lady becomes “a habit.” It is both a sign of belonging to Mary and a pledge of her protection. She clothes us in her own virtues and protects us within her own mantle. The Blessed Virgin will help us after our death, especially on Saturday, the day particularly dedicated to her, if we have died in the grace of God and devoutly worn the scapular. There are no prayers to be said, but only the silent reminder, the ever-deepening silence of God’s loving presence.

### Mount Carmel in San Francisco

In San Francisco, a dozen blocks from Star of the Sea Parish, a Carmelite monastery is built on a hill. In the 1920’s, a group of poor Carmelite nuns, fleeing government persecution in Mexico (“the Cristero War”), built a small monastery across the street from St. Ignatius Church. Over the years the monastery grew, and every summer these sisters pray a novena to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, concluding with her feast day on July 16. They sing the song composed by St. Simon Stock in 1251, the *Flos Carmeli*, “Flower of Carmel.” Here is the Latin original, and English translation:

#### Flos Carmeli

Flos Carmeli,  
vitis florigera,  
splendor caeli,  
virgo puerpera  
singularis.

Mater mitis  
sed viri nescia  
Carmelitis  
da privilegia  
Stella Maris

Mater dulcis  
Carmeli domina,  
plebem tuam  
replei laetitia  
qua bearis.

*Flower of Carmel,  
blossoming vine,  
splendor of heaven,  
virgin son-bearing  
of singular goodness.*

*Kind mother  
yet not knowing man,  
to your Carmelites  
grant privileges,  
Star of the Sea.*

*Sweet mother,  
Lady of Carmel,  
your people  
fill with the joy  
with which you are  
blessed.*



#### Recommended reading

“Brown Scapular: A Silent Devotion,” by Father Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D.

*Photo credit:  
monasteryicons.com*

## Our Lady of Mount Carmel Historical Facts and Essential Messages



*Welcome to Our Lady’s Shrine here in San Francisco. In this pamphlet, prepared by our pastor, Fr. Joseph Illo, you will learn the basic facts and message of this apparition. You are encouraged to spend some time in quiet prayer and perhaps go to confession. Please keep a reverent silence in the Church, especially when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.*

### Star of the Sea Church

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**What:** Carmelite devotion to Our Lady

**Where:** Mount Carmel (Israel) & England

**When:** 9th Century BC to 1251 AD

**To Whom:** Prophet Elijah & Simon Stock

Many people wear the Brown Scapular, and two generations ago most children in Catholic schools would be “invested” in the Brown Scapular before their First Holy Communion. Pope John Paul II wore a Brown Scapular all his life, and when he was shot on May 13, 1983 (the Feast of



*Pope John Paul as a young worker in the Solvay chemical plant, jauntily sporting his Brown Scapular*

Our Lady of Fatima), he insisted the surgeons leave his Scapular on as they operated to save his life. In Our Lady of Fatima’s last apparition, on October 13, 1917, she appeared as Our Lady of Mount Carmel, offering to the world both her Son and the Brown Scapular. John Paul II wrote that “the most genuine form of devotion to the Most Holy Virgin, expressed by the humble sign of the Scapular, is the consecration to her Immaculate Heart.” Sister Lucia, the eldest of the three children at Fatima, said in 1950 that “the Scapular and the Rosary are inseparable. The Scapular is a sign of consecration to Our Lady.... Our Lady wants all to wear the Scapular.”

## The First Carmelites

Our story begins on a forested ridge called “Mount Carmel” in northern Israel, twenty miles west of Nazareth. Here the great prophet Elijah summoned the false prophets of Baal in the 9th century BC. Pressured by his wife Jezebel and the political elites, King Ahab built an altar to the Phoenician demon-god Baal, “deity of rain and fertility,” on Mount Carmel. A three-year drought followed this apostasy from the true God, the giver of all life, He who commands the wind and the rain. Elijah instructed Baal’s priests to sacrifice to their “god” on their pagan altar, while he rebuilt the altar of God a short distance away. You can read the dramatic conclusion in I Kings 18, but after the false priests are disposed of, Elijah perched on what is now “Stella Maris Point,” overlooking the vast Mediterranean Sea. He saw a small cloud, the size of a man’s hand, forming on the horizon, heralding a drenching storm that would end the drought. Elijah returned to Jerusalem, but some of his followers remained in the caves on Mount Carmel, praying for the coming of the Messiah (prefigured by the drenching rain of grace) and his Mother (prefigured by the small cloud heralding the rain). After Pentecost, the

*Our Parish trip to the Holy Land in 2019, at Stella Maris Point on Mount Carmel*



*friars in their scapular habits (carmelitefathers.com)*

men were baptized, becoming Christian monks. In the 12th century AD, the Crusaders found these hermits still living on Mount Carmel, and some joined them, calling themselves

the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, or “the Carmelites” for short.

## St. Simon Stock

When Islam took possession of the Holy Land, Christians fled to all parts of Europe. Our Lady appeared to the prior of a Carmelite monastery in England, St. Simon Stock, on July 16, 1251. She gave him a full-length brown scapular, which became the Carmelite habit. A long woolen apron worn over the monk’s tunic, the scapular falls down front and back to his feet. Our Lady promised St. Simon that whoever wore the scapular devoutly would receive the gift of final perseverance and would never see the fires of hell. In time the full-length Carmelite scapular was adapted for devotional use by the laity: it be-



came two small panels of brown cloth joined by strings, worn over the shoulders. The Brown Scapular, neglected in the 1970’s and 80’s, has made a comeback. Children and adults are again wearing the Scapular with faith, believing in Our Lady’s promises.

*St. Thérèse in her Scapular*