

What is the history and devotional practice associated with the scapulars used in the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes 18 different scapulars, each with its own color, symbolism, and associated devotion. The most well-known and widely worn is the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Other popular scapulars include the Green Scapular, the Red Scapular of Christ's Passion, and the Black Scapular of the Seven Sorrows of Mary.

[NB: While the concept of wearing a garment [such as a religious habit] as a sign of devotion exists in Orthodox monasticism, the small, devotional scapulars common in Roman Catholicism are not part of Orthodox practice, however.]

The scapular originates in the habits worn by the monastic orders, beginning with the Benedictines, and later adapted by many other religious communities. Basically, the scapular is a piece of cloth, about chest-wide from shoulder to shoulder, and drapes down the front and the back of the person, with an opening for the head. At first, the scapular served more as an apron worn during work, especially farm work; consequently, in the *Rule of St. Benedict* identified it as the "*scapulare propter opera*" ("the scapular because of works"). After the ninth century, a monk received the scapular after the profession of vows, and it became known as "the yoke of Christ" (*iugum Christi*) and "the shield of Christ" (*scutum Christi*). While certain modifications were made by the various communities over the centuries, the scapular was a distinctive part of the religious habit.

Likewise, over time, pious lay people who worked closely with the monastic communities adopted a smaller version of the scapular. This smaller scapular consisted of two small pieces of cloth joined by two strings, and was worn around the neck and underneath a person's clothing. Eventually these smaller scapulars were marks of membership in confraternities, groups of laity who joined together, attaching themselves to the apostolate of a religious community and accepting certain rules and regulations.

Eventually, these smaller versions of the scapular became even more popular among the laity. To date, the Roman Catholic Church has approved 18 different scapulars, distinguished by color, symbolism, and devotion. Most scapulars still signify a person's affiliation with a particular confraternity, at least loosely.



The following is a brief description of the six most popular scapulars:

The brown scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This scapular is the best known and most popular of the different scapulars. According to tradition, our Blessed Mother appeared to St. Simon Stock at Cambridge, England on Sunday, July 16, 1251. (In the church's liturgical year, July 16th is the feast day for Our Lady of Mount Carmel.) She presented him with the scapular and said, "*Take, beloved son, this scapular of thy order as a badge of my confraternity and for thee and all Carmelites a special sign of grace; whoever dies in this garment, will*

not suffer everlasting fire. It is the sign of salvation, a safeguard in dangers, a pledge of peace and of the covenant." In this apparition and gift, our Blessed Mother promised a special protection for all members of the Carmelite Order, and a special grace at the hour of death to all who wear the scapular, so that they would not perish in Hell, but would be taken up to Heaven by her on the first Saturday after their death. (NB: The Catholic Church does not teach that wearing this or any other scapular is some sure ticket to Heaven; rather, we must strive to be in a state of grace, implore our Lord's forgiveness and trust in the maternal aid of our Blessed Mother — all positive acts of a person who wears a scapular sincerely.)



The red scapular of Christ's Passion. In 1846, Christ appeared to a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and presented a red scapular: One side depicts our crucified Lord with the implements of the passion at the foot of the cross; around the image is the inscription, "*Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, save us.*" On the other side, the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are depicted, with the surrounding inscription, "*Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, protect us.*" Christ promised that all who wear this scapular on every Friday would have a great increase of faith, hope, and charity. This apparition was repeated several times, and on June 25, 1847, Pope Pius IX formally approved the scapular and granted permission for its blessing and investiture.



The black scapular of the Seven Sorrows of Mary. After Pope Alexander IV's formal establishment of the Servite Order in 1255, lay men and women formed a confraternity in honor of the seven sorrows of Mary. As a sign of membership, they wore a black scapular, usually with an image of our Mother of Sorrows on the front and an image of her immaculate heart with seven swords (representing the seven sorrows Mary endured during her life).



The blue scapular of the Immaculate Conception. In 1581, Venerable Ursula Benicasa, foundress of the Order of Theatine Nuns, had a vision of our Lord, who revealed to her the habit and scapular her community was to wear in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Venerable Ursula implored our Lord to grant the same graces to the faithful who would wear a small, light blue scapular, bearing on one side the image of the Immaculate Conception and on the other the name or image of "Mary." In 1671, Pope Clement X granted permission to bless and invest people with this scapular. In 1894, a Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin and Mother of God, Mary was established for all who wear this scapular.



The white scapular of the Holy Trinity. When Pope Innocent III approved of the order of the Trinitarians on Jan. 28, 1198, an angel appeared to him, wearing a white garment on which was a cross formed of a blue horizontal bar and a red vertical bar. This garment became the habit of the Trinitarians, and eventually was the model for the scapular worn by the lay people who became members of the Confraternity of the Most Blessed Trinity. The combination of red and blue in the cross on the White Scapular of the Most Blessed Trinity is thought to represent Jesus' dual nature—both divine and human.



The green scapular. In 1840, our Blessed Mother gave the green scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to Sister Justine Bisqueyburu, a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. She belonged to the same community as St. Catherine Laboure, to whom our Blessed Mother had manifested the Miraculous Medal ten years earlier. This green scapular has the image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on one side, and the image of the Immaculate Heart itself, pierced by a sword, surrounded by the inscription, "*Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.*" This scapular can simply be blessed by a priest, and then worn, or placed

in one's clothing, on the bed or in the room. Pope Pius IX approved the green scapular in 1863 and again in 1870.

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the wearing of a scapular is to reflect on the Prayer of Blessing offered in the *The Roman Ritual*:

"O God, the author and perfecter of all holiness, you call all who are reborn of water and the Holy Spirit to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity. Look with kindness on those who devoutly receive this scapular (in praise of the Holy Trinity or in honor of Christ's passion or in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary). As long as they live, let them become sharers in the image of Christ your Son and, after they have fulfilled their mission on earth with the help of Mary, the Virgin Mother, receive them into the joy of your heavenly home."

The key to this devotion is not simply the wearing of a piece of cloth, but the spiritual conversion it signifies.

The Catholic Church recognizes and approves several different scapulars, each associated with a specific devotion or religious order.

Additionally, here is a list of some of the other widely known and approved scapulars:

- Scapular of the Blessed Virgin Mary: A general scapular dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
 - Scapular of the Most Precious Blood: Honors the Most Precious Blood of Jesus.
 - Scapular of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary: Honors the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.
 - Scapular of St. Benedict: Dedicated to St. Benedict.
 - Scapular of St. Dominic: Dedicated to St. Dominic.
 - Scapular of St. Joseph: Dedicated to St. Joseph.
 - White Scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: Dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
 - White Scapular of Our Lady of Ransom: Dedicated to Our Lady of Ransom.
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- Scapular of St. Michael the Archangel: Often shield-shaped, it is associated with spiritual warfare and features an image of St. Michael slaying a dragon.



("Quis ut Deus" is a Latin phrase meaning "Who is like God?". It is a literal translation of the name Michael (Hebrew: מִיכָאֵל) and is associated with Archangel Michael.)

Both portions of the scapular bear the well-known representation of the Archangel St. Michael defeating Satan. The scapular places the wearer under the special protection of Saint Michael, the Archangel and is considered a "visual prayer".

In closing, these scapulars are not merely decorative items; they are sacramentals, meaning they are material objects blessed by the Church to signify and foster spiritual grace. Each scapular is a tangible reminder of a particular devotion and intended to help individuals grow in their Catholic faith; through the protection and intercession of the scapular's intended person or being.