

## Catholic 101, Scapulars

Millions of Catholics wear the crucifix around their neck for everyone to see, a visible symbol of their love and devotion to Jesus Christ. But did you know many Catholics wear scapulars under their clothes where no one can see? Scapulars have a long history in the Church, starting with Benedictine Monks. A “monastic scapular” is made of one long piece of cloth that goes over the head, resting on the shoulders and hangs down the front and back of the body to the knees or the ankles. There are many religious orders that include the scapular as part of their habit, like the Benedictines, Dominicans, Carmelites, Servants of Mary and many others. These scapulars are visible symbols of freely putting on “the yoke of Christ” and living the vow of obedience. But there is also another type of scapular that no one sees except for God and the one who wears it, it is called the “devotional” scapular. This type of scapular is often made of cloth or plastic. It usually has two small rectangular pieces, perhaps an inch or two long, which are connected by two strands of cloth or plastic. It is worn under one’s clothes with one piece of the scapular in the front and the other in the back. There are all kinds of this type of scapular; each type is simply a reminder of devotion that one can literally feel on their chest and between their shoulder blades. Perhaps one of the best known scapulars is the Brown Scapular, or the Lady of Mount Carmel Scapular which was promoted by the Carmelite monk St. Simon Stock in the thirteenth century. For hundreds of years this scapular was said to give the “Sabbatine Privilege” which meant that anyone who wore the brown scapular faithfully and piously would be greeted by our Blessed Mother on the first Saturday following their death, and she would personally deliver them from purgatory and lead them straight to heaven. But this notion was never an official belief of the Church; it has only always been part of what we might call popular piety. Salvation is pure gift, and there is nothing we can wear to earn admittance into heaven, or manipulate God. Besides, believing such things diminishes the purpose of wearing a scapular, it is not worn to get anything, rather to give, it is a constant physical reminder to give devotion and praise to God, in a way that is deeply personal, and can only be seen in the fruits of compassion such devotion ripens.