

The Miraculous Medal

The devotion commonly known as that of the Miraculous Medal owes its origin to Zoe Labore, a member of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, known in religion as Sister Catherine [Note: She was subsequently canonized], to whom the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared three separate times in the year 1830, at the mother-house of the community at Paris. The first of these apparitions occurred 18 July, the second 27 November, and the third a short time later. On the second occasion, Sister Catherine records that the Blessed Virgin appeared as if standing on a globe, and bearing a globe in her hands. As if from rings set with precious stones dazzling rays of light were emitted from her fingers. These, she said, were symbols of the graces which would be bestowed on all who asked for them. Sister Catherine adds that around the figure appeared an oval frame bearing in golden letters the words "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee"; on the back appeared the letter M, surmounted by a cross, with a crossbar beneath it, and under all the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, the former surrounded by a crown of thorns, and the latter pierced by a sword.

At the second and third of these visions a command was given to have a medal struck after the model revealed, and a promise of great graces was made to those who wear it when blessed. After careful investigation, M. Aladel, the spiritual director of Sister Catherine, obtained the approval of Mgr. de Quelen, Archbishop of Paris, and on 30 June, 1832, the first medals were struck and with their distribution the devotion spread rapidly. On 23 July, 1894, Pope Leo XIII, after a careful examination of all the facts by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, instituted a feast, with a special Office and Mass, of the Manifestation of the Immaculate Virgin under the title of the Miraculous Medal, to be celebrated yearly on 27 November by the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, under the rite of a double of the second class. For ordinaries and religious communities who may ask the privilege of celebrating the festival, its rank is to be that of a double major feast. A further decree, dated 7 September, 1894, permits any priest to say the Mass proper to the feast in any chapel attached to a house of the Sisters of Charity.

The small scapulars

General ecclesiastical regulations concerning the small scapulars

The small scapulars consist essentially of two quadrilateral segments of woolen cloth (about two and three-quarter inches long by two inches wide), connected with each other by two strings or bands in such a manner that, when the bands rest on the shoulders, the front segment rests before the breast, while the other hangs down an equal distance at the back. The two segments of cloth need not necessarily be equally large, various scapulars having the segment before the breast of the above dimensions while the segment at the back is much smaller. The material of these two essential parts of the scapular must be of woven wool; the strings or bands may be of any material, and of any one colour. The colour of the segments of woollen cloth depends on the colour of the monastic habit, which it to a certain extent represents, or on the mystery in honour of which it is worn. Here, however, it must be remarked that the so called Brown Scapular of the Carmelites may be black, and that the bands of the Red Scapular of the Passion must be of red wool. On either or both of the woollen segments may be sewn or embroidered becoming representations or other decorations (emblems, names etc.) of a different material. It is only in the case of the Red Scapular that the images are expressly prescribed.

Several scapulars may be attached to the same pair of strings or bands; each scapular must of course be complete, and must be attached to both bands. In many cases the five best-known of the early scapulars are attached to the same pair of bands; this combination is then known as the "fivefold scapular". The five are: the Scapular of the Most Blessed Trinity, that of the Carmelites, of the Servites, of the Immaculate Conception, and the Red Scapular of the Passion. When the scapulars are thus joined together, the bands must be of red wool, as required by the Red Scapular; it is customary to wear the Red Scapular uppermost and that of the Most Blessed Trinity undermost, so that the images specially prescribed in the case of the Red, and the small red and blue cross on the Scapular of the Blessed Trinity, may be visible.

Only at the original reception of any scapular is either the blessing or the investment with such by an authorized priest necessary. When a person needs a new scapular, he can put on an unblest one. If the investment with a scapular be inseparably connected with reception into a confraternity, the reception and enrollment must take place on the same occasion as the blessing and investment. To share in the indulgences and privileges of a scapular, one must wear it constantly; it may be worn over or under one's clothing and may be laid aside for a short time, if necessary. Should one have ceased wearing the scapular for a long period (even through indifference), one gains none of the indulgences during this time, but, by simply resuming the scapular, one again participates in the indulgences, privileges, etc. Every scapular, which is not merely an object of private devotion (for there are also such) but is also provided with an indulgence, must be approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, and the formula of blessing must be sanctioned by the Congregation of Rites. In this article we speak only of scapulars approved by the Church.

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