

DEVOTION TO MARY AND HER SCAPULAR IN THE ORDER OF ST. DOMINIC

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PART III

THE SCAPULAR, THE PRINCIPAL PART OF THE DOMINICAN HABIT



THE DIVERSE ELEMENTS which made up the Friars Preachers' habit, the gift of Mary, if taken separately, were not entirely new. The black cappa had been worn by the Brothers of the Militia of Jesus Christ; the white tunic was common to many of the Canons Regular; the capuce, worn on the head as a sign of recollection or lowered from the head as a sign of reverence, is traceable to the Fathers of the desert; short grey scapulars were used by monks and laybrothers of different orders to protect their tunics while they were at work. Nevertheless, Mary's gift was truly a new habit, a creation of her love. The elimination of the surplice, which up to then had been the distinctive mark of the first companions of Dominic, the poorer quality of the cloth adopted, especially for the cappa since it was more visible, and the combination of the different parts—all these sufficed to make the ensemble a unique and characteristic habit. Consequently, when the faithful saw a friar wearing it, they could say: "There is a son of Dominic! There is a preacher of Mary!"¹

It is precisely this striking character of the Dominican habit which tempted other orders to appropriate it wholly or in part. However, the Popes stood by the Order in maintaining for it the privilege of its habit. There is proof of this in the Bulls of Gregory IX, the intimate friend of Dominic, and in those of Innocent IV, Alexander IV, Clement IV, Honorius IV, Boniface VIII, John XXII, Clement VI, Gregory XI, Boniface IX, etc. If the habit of the Religious of Mercy, despite these prohibitions, is almost identical with that of the

¹ From the ancient Chronicles we learn that Mary liked to call the Friars Preachers *her Order*, "Ordo Meus."

Friars Preachers, it is because St. Raymond of Pennafort was one of the promoters of their Order. The chronicles report that at the vesting of their founder, St. Peter Nolasco, Raymond held one section of the scapular which was placed upon the new religious, the first Master General, while the King of Aragon and the diocesan Bishop held the other section, as a sign of honor and approbation.

The Friar Preacher must faithfully observe his obligation of proudly wearing the habit for a fourfold reason:

- 1) It is a testimony of his gratefulness towards Mary.
- 2) It is his armor, for it protects him, unless he has lost all sense of propriety, from every bearing, posture, deed, and word, not in conformity with the dignity of his state.
- 3) It is a protestation of his profession of which he intends to be proud rather than to be ashamed, even though he is sometimes abused and ridiculed.²
- 4) It is an affirmation in the name of the Order of its right to exist everywhere under the sun and to do good without hindrance.

If there were some members of the Dominican Order who were inobedient or rebellious, the sovereign pontiffs authorized the superior to deprive them of the habit. Unfaithful to the spirit, virtues, and practices of their vocation, they were no longer worthy of wearing its holy habit. Similarly the soldier, unfaithful to the flag, is publicly degraded; if he still has any self respect, this is the most unbearable of chastisements.

The long scapular was recognized as occupying the place of honor in this simple and noble composite. It is not surprising, then, that the scapular, rather than all the rest, was regarded as Mary's gift, as the most tender and affectionate pledge of her protection. And the Virgin seems to have wished to justify this belief by according great benefits through it. It has always been true that from the beginning of the Order the constitutions directed that the scapular would be the only part of the habit to receive the solemn blessing in the ceremony of profession and would thus distinguish, in the sight of God and His angels, the newly professed from the simple novices who were still in the year of probation.

² Dominic, meek and humble of heart, returned more readily to those places where his poor habit drew on him outrages. However, in return the pious faithful venerated him, even to the extent of cutting fragments from his habit as reliques.

Having received the blessed scapular the Friar Preacher is bound, precisely by reason of this importance, to wear it openly as a profession of his religious faith and as a protestation that he intends to be faithful to it until death. To go outside of one's cell wearing the tunic without the scapular would be improper; and the annals of the early days of the Order tell of a Brother who was overcome by the devil because he had fallen into this negligence. When the religious goes to bed, if he cannot wear the scapular, he is careful to kiss it reverently and lay it within sight near his bed. He is exhorted to practice this act of piety by the indulgence of five years and five quarantines, conceded to everyone, even a secular person, who devoutly kisses the scapular of St. Dominic.³

How many other graces, spiritual and temporal, have been granted by heaven to this same scapular! The Venerable Anthony of the Blessed Sacrament healed a woman suffering from scrofula by simply extending the scapular upon her. The Venerable Paul of St. Mary, a laybrother, possessed the gift of healing the sick who touched his hands; should he conceal his hands in humility the afflicted became well by kissing his scapular.

This devotion to the holy Dominican habit, particularly to the scapular, flourishes equally among the Sisters of the Order, who practice so faithfully in their cloisters the observances of the Fathers and follow the same regulations in regard to their habit, with the addition of the white wimple and the black veil of consecrated virgins.⁴

If, by misfortune, one of the Sisters becomes inobservant and threatens to become an inveterate rule-breaker, one of the most salutary penances to shake off her apathy, to move her to repentance, and to reanimate her fervor, is to compel her to appear before the community without her veil or without the scapular of Mary.

It is also worthy of note that the members of the Third Order, who were accustomed to frequent the convents of the Fathers and Sisters, showed a high esteem for the habit, and in kissing the scapular had a filial devotion mixed with a holy envy. Might they not also be permitted to wear Mary's habit and gain directly the precious indulgences? Diverse attempts were made, and one of these succeeded under Leo X, who addressed the Sisters of the monastery of St. Catherine in Florence in these words: "It has been brought to our attention that other Dominican Tertiaries, living in common and

³ Vide *Bull. O.P. T.* iv, p. 13.

⁴ Alexander VI (May 29, 1501): "By apostolic authority we grant permission to the Sisters to wear the *patience* after they are professed." Sisters of Blessed Lucy of Narny. The scapular is often called *patience*.

wearing the same habit as you, go out to beg, while you remain in a monastery with a community numbering more than eighty, and not content with following the rule of the Third Order, practice regular observance and pronounce the three vows, after the manner of the cloistered nuns of the Order. Consequently, you desire to differ from the aforementioned Tertiaries, even in your dress. We, therefore, who love to hearken to persons desirous of consecrating themselves to the divine service, accord to you in perpetuity the privilege of wearing over your white tunic the blessed white scapular, according to the practice of the nuns who follow the Institutions of the Friars Preachers.”⁵

This was a great step in extending the scapular to others, but not the last one. Tertiaries living in common without solemn vows and without the great observances of clostral life also had their merits. If they went outside the convent, it was for works of zeal that were becoming more and more necessary by reason of the progress of religious indifference and immorality. They were, therefore, penetrated, animated, and clothed with the spirit of St. Dominic. Were their works of devotion, then, to turn against them to the extent of excluding them from the complete participation in the habit of the Order? Gradually under the benevolence of the Popes and under the protection of the Masters General, the barriers were lowered; the scapular was granted to them, and time has shown that they knew how to wear it worthily.

Then the precious favor was extended to Tertiaries who, living at home, made a vow of chastity with the permission and under the direction of the local ordinary. Such was St. Rose of Lima. It is recounted that while she was seriously ill, she wished to have her scapular laid out upon her bed, and she kissed it lovingly at the moment of death, saying: “Beautiful white habit, you are leading me to heaven!”

Finally, during these past centuries the Tertiaries who live in the world, amidst its struggles, dangers, and tribulations, also receive on the day of their vestition or profession a scapular which is small in size but great in its signification.

Among the illustrious Tertiaries who wore this scapular, or *little habit* (for in the scapular the whole habit was thought to be represented), we can cite Bl. Lucy of Narni, already mentioned earlier. St. Dominic, appearing to her, clothed her with the scapular of the Order at the command of Christ, and added: “You will keep this habit until death; and you will consider Dominic as your father, and Catherine

⁵ Const. *Cum sicut nobis*. May 15, 1521.

of Siena as your mother." We have also the example of the Venerable M. Olier, the founder of the Congregation of Saint Sulpice. At the hour of death, this pious servant of Mary "clothed with the small scapular, confessed with a lively feeling of devotion and gratitude that he was indebted to the Order of St. Dominic for all the graces which he had received up to that time."⁶

Msgr. Suarez, Bishop of Vaison in Provence, while visiting out of devotion one of our churches in Italy at the time of the celebrations for the canonization of St. Rose of Lima, received the honor of singing the Pontifical Mass by reason of his being a Tertiary, and as proof he showed the small scapular which he wore on his breast. The servant of God, Claudia of the Angels, after her entrance into the Third Order, had received permission from the Master General, Fr. Antoninus Cloche, to wear the whole habit. Since, however, this would have restricted her freedom of action and her influence among the people in directing *The Pious Work of Charity*, which she had founded, she wore a small scapular underneath her clothing in testimony of her attachment to the spirit of St. Dominic. Even in lands of the infidels we have seen in our own time numerous and fervent Christians eager to be enrolled in the Third Order of St. Dominic. On some days, the missionaries relate, scapulars had to be prepared by the hundreds. Those who received the scapular were not moved to do so through vain glory or through a desire of pious satisfaction. This was clear from their progress in Christian perfection and was proved more surely when, in the time of persecution, they met death joyfully for the glory of Jesus and Mary. More fortunate than Catherine of Siena they plucked through their martyrdom the *vermilion rose*, testimony and reward of their great faith.

⁶ Faillon.