

Spiritual Preparation for Being Received into the Order

When you have completed the six instructions of the ascetic classes, you are ready to be clothed with the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This is an important step in your vocation, and hence it requires some serious spiritual preparation.

I would like to suggest that you spend some days in prayer, possibly making a novena or a triduum to prepare for the big day. When a person makes a novena, it means that for nine days one is praying to the Holy Spirit for the help and assistance that are needed to take the important step seriously and reverently. Personally, when I make a novena, I feel like one who is under a doctor's care for those nine days, but of course in this case I am under the special care and guidance of the Holy Spirit. I remind myself that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit so that He can lead us into all truth. The Holy Spirit will not just make us remember the words and the teachings of Jesus, but the Scripture tells us that He will lead us into those truths.

But in your case, you are preparing to take a very important step in entering the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. You

are praying that the Holy Spirit will enlighten you so that you can embrace this vocation with all the love and generosity that you are capable of. What will you be praying for in this novena or triduum? Or, more precisely, what should you be praying for? All you have to do is to reflect on the ceremony of the clothing of the aspirant with the habit of the Order and you will be able to see what God will want you to think about and above all desire.

Here is the actual ceremony for *The Admission to Formation*:

ADMISSION TO FORMATION

1. *This ceremony should not take place during the celebration of Mass so that greater significance may be given to the Promise and the Vows which are normally to be made during Mass.*
2. *Holy water, an aspersory, and a large Brown Scapular should be conveniently placed.*
3. *The priest will use a white stole.*
4. *The aspirant(s), accompanied by the Master of Formation, comes forward and stands before the priest:*

Master of Formation:

Father, the members of the Fraternity of . . . present . . . for reception as a candidate for Formation.

Aspirant: (If more than one Aspirant, one is chosen to speak for all)

Reverend Father, my brothers and sisters: Drawn by God's grace and mercy I (we) come to ask you to teach me (us) the following of Christ and the life of prayer and self-denial in the service of the Church and of all mankind. Help me (us) learn the Rule and the Spirit of Carmel, the observance of Christ's Law, and perfect love.

5. *The priest briefly addresses the aspirant(s) in these or similar words:*

You are asking to undertake the pursuit of evangelical perfection under the guidance and spiritual direction of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers. You are embracing the

ideals of the Third Order which are based on the charisms and teaching of the Order's founders, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. These saints treasured a deep sense of God's love, fidelity to contemplative prayer, the spirit of detachment, and generosity in the practice of fraternal charity and the apostolate. May the Blessed Virgin Mary be for you the model of your dedication to God; and may she watch over you always.

6. *The priest then blesses the scapular(s) as follows:*

Priest: Let us pray: O God, you clothed your Son with our mortal flesh in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary; bestow a rich blessing upon this (these) scapular(s). Grant that (name(s)) may wear it as a sign of consecration to the Mother of God and grow in the likeness of Christ Jesus her Son.

All: Amen.

7. *The priest then sprinkles the scapular(s) with holy water and, with the help of the Master of Formation, places it on the aspirant(s).*

Priest: The Carmelite Third Order cordially welcomes you as a candidate for Formation. May God strengthen you with his grace and may Christ be your teacher and light.

For the sake of clarity, I would like to summarize the chief truths and lessons that are proposed to the beginner. They are:
1. I come to ask that I be taught how to follow Christ more generously and courageously; and I also ask to be taught to live a life of prayer and self-denial in the service of the Church and of all mankind. Your intention is to grow in the fullness of Christian love, hence you are seeking to learn more about the Rule and the Spirit of Carmel for this very purpose, for these are based on the Law of Christ.

2. The priest, in the name of the entire Order of Carmel, reminds you that you are committing yourself to pursue the perfection proposed by the Gospel under the guidance of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers.

He will also remind you that you are embracing the ideals of the Secular Order of Carmel and that these ideals are based on

the charisms and teachings of Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross, the founders of our Order. What were the ideals proposed by these saints and that you now seek to embrace with all your heart? The following words say it all:

a) These saints treasured a deep sense of God's love, fidelity to contemplative prayer, the spirit of detachment, and generosity in the practice of fraternal charity and the apostolate.

b) Mary is now proposed as the model of all Carmelites. The ceremony continues: "May the Blessed Virgin Mary be for you the model of your dedication to God; and may she watch over you always."

c) The scapular. The official part of the ceremony consists in being clothed with the scapular of Our Lady. These are the words used in the blessing of the scapular: "Grant that he (she) may wear it as a sign of consecration to the Mother of God and grow in the likeness of Christ Jesus her Son."

The ceremony concludes with the priest welcoming you to the period of formation. He asks that God "will strengthen you with his grace and that Christ may be your teacher and light."

Conclusion—I think that if you are spending a number of days to prepare for this ceremony and if these are the issues that you are concerned with and placing before the Lord, then you may be sure that you are going to be prepared properly when the day arrives. The grace and love of God will always be with you.

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