

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Mount Carmel is a mountain in present-day Israel. The history of this mountain is important to our faith. It was on this mountain that Elijah, a prophet of the Old Testament, confronted people who were worshipping the pagan god Baal. (See 1 Kings 18:20–46.) He told them to decide, once and for all, who their God would be. Was it going to be the one true God or Baal? To help the people decide, Elijah offered a sacrifice to the Lord God. Fire consumed the entire sacrifice. The people were amazed and recognized this as a sign that the

God of Israel was indeed the one true God. Elijah then went to the top of the mountain to pray. While he was there, “a cloud as small as a man’s hand” (1 Kings 18:44) rose from the sea that was near the mountain. From that time on, Mount Carmel was considered a holy place. It eventually became a place for hermits—people who live alone in a secluded place, usually so that they can dedicate themselves to God.

In the year 1206, the group of hermits living on Mount Carmel began to follow a rule—a guide to spiritual living. The rule, given to the hermits by Saint Albert, is still followed today. It instructed the hermits to honor Elijah the Prophet as their spiritual father and to honor God’s Word and follow



Our Lady of Mount Carmel, courtesy of Discalced Carmelite Order

it, just as Elijah had done. The rule also dedicated the hermits and their small chapel to Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Mary was their model of faith, service, and discipleship. The religious order called the Carmelites grew out of this group. In the early thirteenth century, members of the Carmelites began to migrate to Europe, and new communities of Carmelites were started.

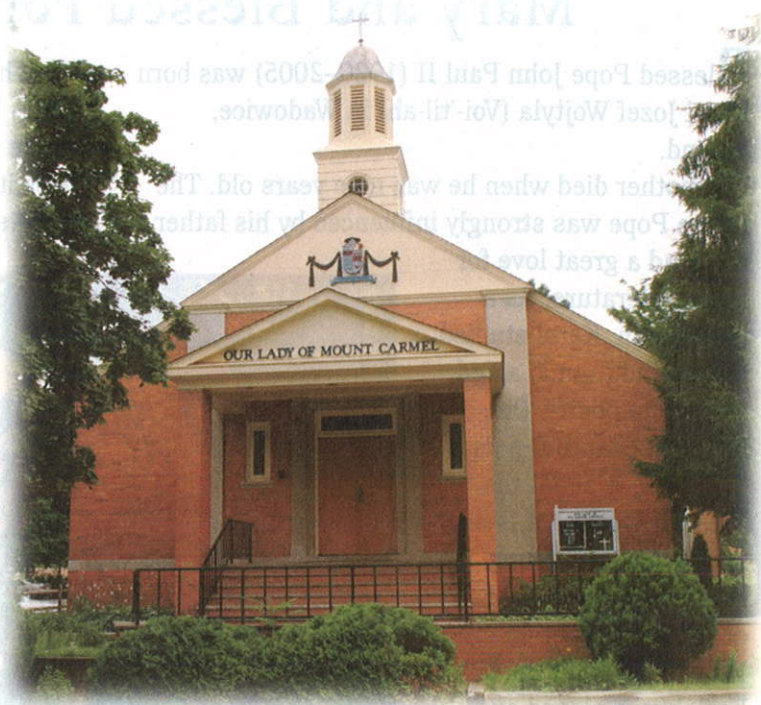
On July 16, 1251, Simon Stock, leader of the Carmelites, saw a vision of Mary. Simon had prayed

to Mary to ask God’s blessing on the Carmelite community, which had now spread to fifteen countries but was facing many difficulties. Mary appeared to Simon and presented him with a brown scapular, telling him, “It is the badge of Salvation, a shield in time of danger, and a pledge of special protection.” The scapular consists of two pieces of cloth showing images of Mary, one worn on the chest, and the other on the back, connected by strings. The word “scapular” comes from the Latin word *scapula*, which means “shoulder blade.” In honor of this apparition, the Carmelites established the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which is celebrated on July 16.

Celebrating Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel became very popular throughout the Church. As people learned about the vision of Mary and the promise of the scapular, they began to pray to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and to wear the small brown scapular. The scapular usually has a picture of Mary as Our Lady of Mount Carmel on it.

On July 16 parishes dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel often hold street festivals. Some parishes have parade-like processions on neighborhood streets or on church property to celebrate the feast.



Activity

Mary was a person of great faith and prayer. Whenever Mary faced a difficult situation, she prayed and trusted in God. Mary is a perfect model for Catholics today. We can recall Mary's example whenever we face difficult decisions or challenges.

A situation in which I might find myself that would require trust in God is

A time when I might want or need to pray is

O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.
From the Collect, Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, III, Roman Missal