

The Scapular and Cord of Yesterday!

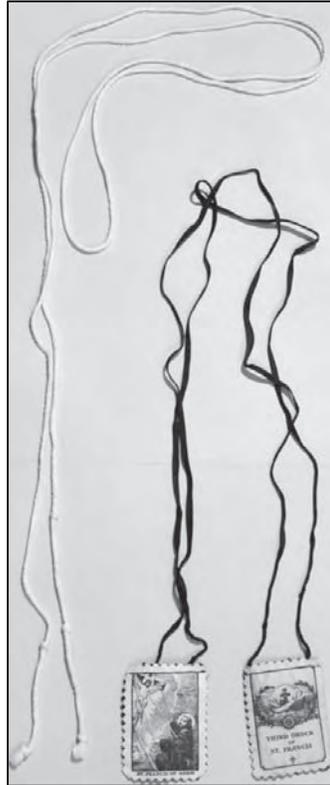
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[The following recollection comes from Dolores Cullen (nee Twadell), who was Professed as a member of the St. Anthony Fraternity in Chicago.]

What I recall here is a ceremony at St. Peter's Church in Chicago, before it became St. Peter's in the Loop, at 110 West Madison Street. The OFM Franciscans had not yet built the multipurpose structure that is their present church and much more.

The place is Old St Peter's Church at Clark and Polk in Chicago - by the railroad yards. It's the late 1940s and a ceremony is about to take place. Several young people - a young woman and three young men - are gathered on the sidewalk next to the church. They are the Prefect, Vice-prefect, and Mistress and Master of Novices. For this formal occasion, each wears the brown basic ankle-length tunic of the First Order. They wait for the Franciscan priest, who is the fraternity's spiritual advisor, to join them. When he does, they process into the church. The Prefect of the young peoples' fraternity (the "Antonians") leads the way, carrying a staff fashioned as a crucifix.

It is the fourth Sunday of the month and the fraternity members, ranging in age from 18 to 35 or so, have come together from all over the city for their monthly meeting. Some are graduates of Alvernia High School, continuing the Franciscan relationship begun with the nuns there. Married couples bring their little ones. The group numbers close to 100 and arrives by "L" and streetcar. As always, they will say their Office (12 Our Fathers, 12 Hail Marys and 12 Glories) in unison, followed by Benediction. But today has added significance. Nine postulants will become novices and receive the habit -scapular and cord - of the Third Order.



When it is time for the postulants to come forward, the Master and Mistress of Novices signal to them. Four men and five women in their twenties approach and kneel at the altar rail. While the words of the Reception ceremony are said, the Master, inside the railing, and the Mistress, behind those who are kneeling, each hold one of the brown woolen patches of the Franciscan scapular and guide it over the heads of the recipients. (To facilitate the ritual donning of the scapular, the ladies had been asked to wear simple, brimless hats.) Now the Mistress takes five of the cords, reaches around the waist of each woman and loops one of the cords in place. The Master does the same for the young men.

With a final blessing, applause and general rejoicing follows as the entire group exits the church and makes its way down the long, outdoor staircase to the lower level. Coffee and doughnuts and congratulations to our new novices are the order of the business and social meeting.

The scapular and cord, thereafter, will be worn beneath one's street clothes and removed when one disrobes. (The habit would often become a topic of conversation during routine visits to a doctor.) In the excitement of the day, you can picture that a new novice might not be attentive to every bit of information. Such was the case with Donna, an eager novice wanting to do her best and a newlywed of three months, as well. She had married a non-Franciscan which is OK, but she would need her husband's permission to become a lifelong Third Order member.

Brad, Donna's husband, immediately began to find objections to her Franciscan ways. The young woman, in her frustration, phoned me. I, a three-year veteran Tertiary with two children, listened in hopes of being helpful.

"Until I became a novice, we were fine," she lamented, "but last night Brad even said he didn't want me to be professed." She was almost in tears.

"What happened?"

"Well . . . the scapular aggravates him and the cord keeps getting in the way!"

"Donna, didn't you hear that the scapular and cord are to be taken off with your regular clothing?"

"Oh!"

When she gained that missing piece of information it naturally eliminated the obstacle to her being a Franciscan Tertiary. The following year Brad, with little Brad Jr. in his arms, happily attended Donna's Profession.