

A ZENIT DAILY DISPATCH

Blessings and Affiliations

Admission to an Association Requires More

ROME, 4 SEPT 2018 (ZENIT) Answered by Legionary of Christ Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy and dean of theology at the Regina Apostolorum university.

Q: Ever since the *motu proprio* “*Summorum Pontificum*,” the *Rituale Romanum*, which was in use until 1962, may be used. Additionally, the 1965 instruction “*Inter Oecumenici*” lifted the reservations on many blessings which are contained in the *Rituale* and were reserved for members of certain congregations. Some of those blessings were given when someone was being formally admitted into a fraternity or a general affiliation to a spiritual family. With the lifting of the reservations, is the admission into such an affiliation possible for every priest who performs those blessings? — B.W., Klagenfurt, Austria

A: We addressed the question of reserved blessings in a column on May 17, 2016. In that piece, we mentioned that the blessings formally reserved to members of certain religious congregations could now be imparted by any priest. These blessings were principally:

— Reserved to the Order of Servites: Blessing and erecting stations of the Sorrowful Mother in honor of Our Lady of the Seven Dolors; blessing and investiture with the black scapular of Our Lady of Sorrows; blessing of the rosary of the Seven Sorrows

— Reserved to the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Ransoming of Captives: Blessing and investiture with scapular of Blessed Trinity; blessing of the rosary or Trisagion of the Most Holy Trinity

— Reserved to the Congregation of Passionists: Blessing and investiture with the black scapular of Our Lord’s Sacred Cross and Passion

— Reserved to the Congregation of the Missions: Blessing and investiture with the red scapular of Our Lord’s Passion and Sacred Heart, and of the Immaculate Virgin’s Loving and Compassionate Heart

— Reserved to the Theatines, Clerks Regular: Blessing and investiture with the blue scapular of the Immaculate Virgin Mary

— Reserved to the Order of Discalced Carmelites: Blessing and investiture with scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel; blessing of water in honor of St. Albert, Confessor

— Reserved to the Order of Carmelites: Blessing of the Rosary of St. Joseph; blessing of the Ring of St. Joseph

— Reserved to the Order of Our Lady of Mercy for Ransoming Captives: Blessing and investiture with scapular of Our Lady of Ransom; blessing of water for the sick in honor of St. Raymond Nonnatus; blessing of candles in honor of St. Raymond Nonnatus; blessing of oil in honor of St. Serapion, Martyr

— Reserved to Clerks Regular for Care of the Sick: Blessing and investiture with scapular of Our Lady, Health of the Sick

— Reserved to the Hermits of St. Augustine: Blessing and investiture with scapular of Our Lady of Good Counsel; blessing and investiture with the cincture in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary

— Reserved to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin: Blessing and investiture with scapular of St. Joseph, Spouse of Mary and Patron of the Universal Church

— Reserved to the Order of Minims: Blessing and investiture with wool cincture in honor of St. Francis of Paola

— Reserved to the Order of Preachers: blessing of cinctures in honor of St. Thomas Aquinas for preservation of chastity; blessing of rosaries of Our Lady; blessing of roses for the Society of the Rosary; blessing of candles for Rosary Society; blessing of water with the relics of St. Peter the Martyr; blessing of palms or other foliage on the feast of St. Peter the Martyr; blessing of water for the sick in honor of St. Vincent Ferrer.

— Reserved to the Congregation of the Missions: Blessing and investiture with sacred medal of Mary Immaculate, commonly known as the Miraculous Medal; blessing of water for the sick in honor of St. Vincent de Paul

— Reserved to the Order of Camaldolese: Blessing of the rosary of Our Lord

— Reserved to the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood: Blessing of rosaries of the Precious Blood

— Reserved to the Order of the Holy Savior: Blessing of rosaries of St. Bridget

— Reserved to the Order of St. Benedict: Blessing of the sick with a relic of True Cross or the Sign of St. Maurus the Abbot

— Reserved to the Society of Jesus: Blessing of water in honor of St. Ignatius, Confessor

In practice, many of these blessings are still used primarily by members of the religious order in question since they are usually granted to people who have some direct contact and association with the spirituality of the congregation.

Others, such as the use of the Carmelite scapular and the Miraculous Medal, are used by many devout Catholics not directly associated with the respective religious order.

The question our reader poses regards the situation in which the blessing and/or investiture formed part of the induction ceremony that affiliated the person into a fraternity or third order of the spiritual family connected to the blessing.

I would say that a distinction must be made. Membership in any association in the Church is determined by the statutes of the association itself.

For example, according to the website of the Carmelite order:

“The Carmelite Third Order is divided into communities, fraternities or sodalities which are accompanied by the superiors of the Carmelite Order or their delegates. These groups are instituted by the Prior General of the Carmelite Order according to the law of the Church with the previous approval of the local Bishop.

“Those who wish to be members of the Carmelite Third Order must be practicing Catholics. They must not be members of any other Third Order or Secular Institute, except in special cases, and they must be at least 18 years of age. After a period of initial formation, candidates are accepted for profession.”

The Passionists have an analogous association, albeit with looser requirements for entry:

“The Confraternity of the Passion of Christ is a society of lay men and women dedicated in a special way to the contemplation of the Passion of Jesus Christ — in Himself — in their own lives — and in the lives of others. St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775), founder of the Passionist Fathers, Brothers, and Nuns, began the first Confraternity in 1755. He wanted as many as possible of the People of God to share in the life, spirit, and mission of the Passionist family.

“Our purpose is above all to gain a deeper love and understanding of the Passion of Christ and then to apply it to the crucified of today: to ourselves, to the physically and mentally ill, and to all who are experiencing Christ’s Passion in their lives in any way. Furthermore, members are to assist and strengthen each other in their desire to draw closer to God through Passionist spirituality and share in all the good works, prayers and indulgences of Passionist communities throughout the world.

“The Confraternity of the Passion of Christ is open to all, men and women, single and married, to anyone who feels God is calling them to the Passionist way of life.

“To become a member of the Confraternity of the Passion of Christ it is necessary to make a personal commitment to cultivate in oneself devotion to the Passion of Christ and through it to grow more deeply in faith and love of God and one’s neighbor. It is also required that one’s name be entered on the membership list.

“By joining the Confraternity, a person assumes no strict obligations, but there is a Rule of Life as a guide and some recommended practices.”

Other associations and fraternities would have similar rules.

From this, it is clear that one may not become a third order Carmelite or be inducted into any other approved association of faithful just by receiving the prescribed blessing from any priest. This would be true even when the previously reserved blessing still forms part of the induction ceremony of the association.

The person would still be able to receive the spiritual graces tied to the rite of blessing as well as those corresponding to wearing the scapular or medal, using the blessed water, rosary etc.

However, since any priest may now give these blessings, the superiors of a group associated with a formerly reserved blessing would, at least in theory, be able to establish branches of the third order, confraternity etc., even where there are no priests of the religious order present in the region.

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