

The Godparent's Role in Baptism

When the time for an infant baptism arrives, it is also the time for the parents to select the godparents. This is a matter of tremendous spiritual importance, and the parents should use a number of spiritual criteria to make their choice.

According to canon law, it is the duty and privilege of Catholic parents to pass on the gift of faith to their newly baptized child, and likewise, it is the duty and privilege of godparents to assist the parents with this all-important task. A person cannot give what he or she does not have. Therefore, the single most important factor is whether the person is an active, practicing Catholic.

To be a godparent, the person must be a fully initiated Catholic, one who is baptized and has received the sacraments of Eucharist and confirmation. In order to be of sufficient maturity and capacity, the godparent must be at least 16 years of age. And very importantly, it should be a person "who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on" or, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, the godparents "must be firm believers."

A firm believer is someone who has faith and trust in God, is a disciple of Jesus, is a member of the Church, belongs to a parish, prays regularly, attends Mass, is a frequent recipient of the sacraments, attempts to conform his or her life to the Gospel, is growing in virtue, gives good example and is a loving, generous and caring person. The godparent's faith need not be perfect, but it must be a priority and active.

Next, according to the Catechism, the godparents must be "able and ready to help the newly baptized ... on the road of Christian life." "Able and ready" means someone who is eager to serve, who will joyfully embrace the role and who can be available to have regular contact with the child.

"Help" is offered to facilitate growth in the Catholic faith, and it can be given in a wide variety of ways: to pray with their godchild, pray for their godchild, teach prayers, take their godchild to church, help their godchild prepare for other sacraments, be present for the celebration of future sacraments, possibly serve as the confirmation sponsor, give good example, offer spiritual support and encouragement, do good works with their godchild and extend special kindnesses to their godchild. It is extremely beneficial for godparents to read, explain and reflect upon sacred Scripture with their godchild, particularly the life of Jesus, as well as other characters and events of the Bible. It is also worthwhile to discuss the lives of the saints. A godparent helps the godchild to practice and persevere in the faith.

There are several other considerations. There may be one or two godparents: one male sponsor, the godfather; or one female sponsor, the godmother; or one of each. According to the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, "A sponsor who is married must be married in accord with the laws of the Church." Additionally, canon law states that a baptized person from a different Christian denomination may only serve as a witness and not as a godparent. A parent may not be the godparent of his or her own child, and anyone bound by a canonical penalty may not serve as a godparent.

Requirements of Godparents

Baptism is a sacrament of initiation into both union with Christ and membership in the Catholic Church. The Church, therefore, asks that at least one Godparent be fully initiated into the Catholic Church and currently practicing the faith.

THE ROLE OF THE GODPARENT IS TWOFOLD: 1) to represent the Catholic Church into which the child is to be initiated. 2) to serve as a model of vibrant faith and provide support as the child grows in faith, hope and love.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF A GODPARENT are based on the above understanding of the sacrament and the responsibilities cited. According to the Code of Canon Law godparents must:

- 1) Be a fully initiated Catholic, that is, who has been Baptized, Confirmed and received First Eucharist.
- 2) Be at least sixteen (16) years of age.
- 3) Have the qualifications of intentions of fulfilling the role of Godparent.
- 4) Not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.
- 5) If married, be validly married in the Catholic Faith.

"Christian Witness"

A baptized non-Catholic who is a practicing member of another Christian Church may serve along with a Catholic godparent. A non-Catholic, this person cannot fulfill the first role of the godparent but as a Christian can fulfill the second. This person is therefore called a Christian Witness.

Non-Baptized Persons

A non-baptized person may not serve as a godparent or a Christian Witness since he/she could not fulfill either role.

This form must be completed by the Godparent and/or Christian Witness and returned to the rectory prior to the baptism.

Full Name (as it will appear on the certificate)

Name of the child you are sponsoring

Church & City of your Baptism

Church & City of your Confirmation

I am a registered member of _____ parish/congregation, actively going to church and trying to live a life of grace. I have read the role and requirements of a Godparent/Christian Witness. I understand the gift and responsibility that this entails and to the best of my ability will try to fulfill them.

Godparent's Signature

Date

Catch Fr. Brian after Mass or at the rectory. Or if the Godparent/Christian Witness is not a member of St. Mary Parish, please ask your pastor to attest to the following: "I know this person to be a member of my parish, I see them at church on a regular basis and I believe them to be trying to live the faith. I believe them to be able to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of a Godparent/Christian Witness."

Date

Pastor's Signature