

Liguori Sacramental Preparation Series



Your Guide to Godparenting

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Jim Merhaut

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Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR
Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri 63057
To order, call 800-325-9521 or visit liguori.org

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p ISBN: 978-0-7648-2580-4
e ISBN: 978-0-7648-7032-3

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists.
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Printed in the United States of America
19 18 17 16 15 / 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition

Marissa Loves Her Godmother



My name is Marissa, and I am seven years old. I'd like to tell you about my godmother, Joan. I think she's the best godmother in the whole world because she's never too busy to talk to me. She plays fun games with me and makes me and my brother Jimmy laugh. We always go to the same Mass and sit side by side. Sometimes, we even say our good-night prayers together on the phone. My godmother makes me feel special, and she gives me great big hugs whenever I see her. I show her she's special by coloring pictures for her.

Marissa is a lucky girl. She's been blessed with a godmother who is serious about her commitment to help Marissa's parents pass the Catholic faith to their daughter. As you read Marissa's short statement, you get the clear sense that godmother Joan:

- listens well;
- makes her relationships a priority;
- has a good sense of humor;
- nurtures her prayer life at home and at church;
- is affectionate;
- appreciates her loved ones; and
- responds to the needs of others.

Faith-filled people who show they care about others make good godparents. It takes a lot of dedication over many years to be a godparent like Joan, but it all starts by capturing the spirit of godparenting before and during the baptismal ceremony.

The sacramental ceremony is the foundation on which you will build yourself into a great godparent. Immersing yourself in the symbols and rituals of the ceremony is key to your preparation for godparenting. What kind of godparent did you have? What kind of godparent do you want to be?

You've Been Asked to Be a Godparent

What do you do when you are asked to be a godparent? That question has a lot of answers. One thing for sure is that a baptismal ceremony is on your calendar, and you need to get ready for it. Good preparation is key to getting great results, and this pamphlet will prepare you well.

First, let's look at the Catholic Church's five minimum requirements for godparents. A baptismal godparent, also called a sponsor:

- ☐ is invited by the parent/guardian of the child to be a godparent;
- ☐ is at least sixteen years old (dioceses can set a different age, and pastors can make exceptions);
- ☐ is a Catholic who has received the sacraments, Eucharist, and confirmation and who leads a life that will be a good example for the child (more on this later);
- ☐ has not received and/or is not in the process of receiving a Church penalty such as excommunication; and
- ☐ is not the child's parent.

Baptized non-Catholics may serve in a godparent role called a *witness* as long as the other godparent is Catholic.

The **five** requirements offer an opportunity to get at the heart of what it means to be a good godparent. Let's examine each a little more closely.

The Invitation: Someone Really Loves You

The first requirement for being a godparent is that you must be *invited*.

It could be said that all of Christianity is based on an invitation. God has invited us into a relationship with him. Abraham, the man we hear about in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, is called the father of our faith because God invited him into a relationship and Abraham accepted the invitation. This invitation and its acceptance was the beginning of our Christian faith.

Why did God invite Abraham? The simplest answer is that God loved Abraham and thought Abraham would be a good person to extend God's love to others. Why were you invited to be a godparent? Someone loves you and thinks you'll be a good, loving influence on his or her child. That's a sign God has a plan for this child and believes you will help unfold that plan.

The invitation you received is deeply significant! Remind yourself each time you see your godchild, each time someone mentions your godchild, and each time you think of your godchild that you are loved and valued deeply by God and by the parents who extended this sacred invitation to you. The more you know and appreciate the love you've received from God and others, the more capable you will be of giving that love away, especially to your godchild. As you grow in this love, allow yourself to imagine and create simple ways to share it with your godchild.

Maturity: Are You Growing in Wisdom?

The second requirement is *maturity*.

The minimum age requirement is usually sixteen. The presumption is that a dedicated, practicing Catholic develops a deeper love for God and for other people as the years pass by. A lot of people are afraid to grow old, but from the perspective of faith, aging is a good thing because each passing day offers new opportunities to grow wiser and become more loving. Wisdom grows when we use each day to serve God by serving other people.

Here's a little wisdom exercise: On a sheet of paper, list of some of the regular things you do and the people you normally interact with on a daily basis. Now look at your list. Each day, God calls you to do these things and interact with these people from a loving/serving perspective. The degree to which you approach these activities and people with a sense of loving service will determine to a large extent your process of maturing in faith and your progress along the path to wisdom.

Wise people think less about what they'll get out of a situation or a relationship and more about what they can give to a situation or relationship. As Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Your dedication to maturing in your faith by living with a servant's heart will help you be the best godparent you can be. Your mature and wise example will make a difference in your godchild's life.

Full Initiation: Take Advantage of Membership

The third requirement for being a Catholic godparent is to be a *member of the Church*.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “for the grace of Baptism to unfold, the...godfather and godmother...must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized—child or adult—on the road of Christian life” (CCC 1255). Your role as a godparent is to help the parents raise their child as a dedicated Catholic. You will not be able to do that unless you are a deeply dedicated Catholic yourself.

A Christian who isn't Catholic can certainly have a strong, positive influence on the faith life of a Catholic child, which is why the Church does allow a non-Catholic Christian to participate in the baptismal ceremony as a witness alongside a Catholic godparent.

But a primary goal of Catholic baptism is to initiate a person into deep membership in the Catholic Church. It's almost impossible to achieve that goal without surrounding a young Catholic with a diverse community of dedicated Catholics. The godparent represents that community and is, in a way, primary among those who set a good Catholic example for the child.

Take a moment to think about your dedication to your Catholic faith:

- How do you express your love for God and others as life's top priorities?
- What is your daily prayer routine?
- How often do you read the Gospels and other parts of the Bible?

- How do you enrich your understanding of your faith?
- At what level do you participate in your parish's faith-formation programs?
- How do you incorporate your faith into your work?
- What ministries do you participate in at your parish?
- In what ways do you serve the poor?
- How do you show your concern for prisoners?
- How do you respond to the needs of the sick or those in mourning?
- Do you use the earth's resources respectfully and carefully?
- Do you vote for your own self-interests or do you have the common good in mind?

These questions are not intended as a checklist for being a “super Catholic”; they’re simply intended to help you think about the connection between your faith and your daily choices. What you believe determines to a large extent how you behave, and how you behave will make a difference in your godchild’s life.

Church Penalties: Every Organization Has Its Limits

The fourth requirement of a Catholic godparent is to be a parish member in *good standing*.

The Church comprises limited human beings. Although we strive for and hope to participate in the perfect kingdom of God, we obviously aren’t there yet. Pope Francis, in his first papal interview, “A Big Heart Open to God,” was asked to define himself. He responded, “I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

We are all sinners and in different places on our faith journeys. It is not necessary to be perfect. It is only necessary to be actively seeking to grow in your relationship with God and the Church if you are going to be a great godparent.

The Church may impose excommunication (restriction from sacramental participation, Catholic worship, and Catholic ministry) or a lesser penalty on Catholics who willfully and knowingly commit a grave offense and don't seek forgiveness and reconciliation. People under such penalties aren't considered good examples to other Catholics.

Partnering With Parents

The fifth and last requirement is that the godparent can't be the child's parent.

Parents are the most important influence on the growth and development of any child, but parents who try to raise children entirely on their own are setting themselves up for failure. When a child is baptized, the Church reminds parents in an unmistakable way that they are not alone and that they need help. A wonderful and supportive community—the Church—stands ready and willing to assist parents in the most important and challenging work they'll ever do.

Godparents are a visible sign of the Church's support for parents. Contemporary child and adolescent development research shows how wise the Church is for encouraging active godparents. The Search Institute in Minneapolis has identified a framework for healthy child and adolescent

development (www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets.org). Children with a wide variety of caring adults in their lives are more likely to make it through childhood and adolescence safely. They're more likely to do well in school, to take care of themselves physically, to be strong leaders, and to appreciate diversity. They're also more likely to avoid drug and alcohol abuse, violent behavior, and unhealthy sexual experimentation. Many experts are now saying that children need at least five nonparent adults in their lives whom they can trust.

Godparents play an important role in helping to keep our children and communities safe. Your active role as a godparent will do far more good than you can imagine, and your absence from the life of this child can promote many undesirable consequences. Godparenting is a powerful and important responsibility.

One of the beautiful things about godparents is that they fulfill their role in complete freedom. Godparents have no legal obligations to their godchildren. You will not be the legal guardian of the child if something tragic happens to the parents. All you do for the child will be, in godlike fashion, a free and undeserved expression of love.



Getting Ready for the Baptismal Ceremony

Now let's look at how your part in the ceremony directly calls you to a lifelong shared ministry with the parents of the child. The ceremony, with its rich symbols and rituals, is the foundation of good godparenting.

Reception of the Child

In this first part of the baptismal ceremony, the priest, bishop, or deacon greets and welcomes everyone to the ceremony, especially you and the parents. Then he asks both the parents and you specific questions. After questioning the parents, he asks if you're ready to help the parents in their duty as Christian parents. You answer the questions by saying "I am" if you are the only godparent or "we are" if you are one of two godparents.

The celebrant makes the Sign of the Cross on the child's forehead and asks the parents to do the same. You may also be invited to make the Sign of the Cross on the child's forehead with your thumb.

By declaring publicly that you're ready to be a godparent, you are committing yourself to being a good role model for this child. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect, but it does mean you must develop the practice of acknowledging your weaknesses and working on deepening your relationship with Christ and the members of the Church.

PSAUMES 119

109 Ma vie est continuellement en
moi.
Et je n'oublie point ta loi.
110 Dieu m'a rendu mon salut de
peup.
Et je ne m'ignore pas loi de tes ordon-
nances.
111 Tes préceptes sont pour toujours
mon héritage.
Car ils sont la joie de mon cœur.
112 L'inculte mon cœur à pécher
tes vaines.
Toutefois, jusqu'à la fin.
113 Je hais les hommes indus.
Et j'aime ta loi.
114 Tu es mon salut et mon bonheur.
J'espère en ta promesse.
115 Éloigne-toi de moi, méchants.
Afin que j'observe les commande-
ments de mon Dieu.
116 Soutiens-moi selon ta promesse.
afin que je vive.
Et ne me rende point confus dans mon
espérance.
117 Sois mon appui, pour que je ne
sois
Et que je m'occupe sans cesse de ta
statuts.
118 Tu mérites tous ceux qui t'aban-
dent de tes statuts.
Car leur récompense est sans effet.
119 Tu enlèves comme le foin
tous les méchants de la terre.
C'est pourquoi j'aime tes préceptes.
120 Ma chair transgresse de l'autre que
tu m'inspires.
Et je crainte tes jugements.
121 J'observe la loi et la justice.
Ne m'abandonne pas à mon oppres-
sion.
122 Prends-moi ta garantie la loi de
tes serviteurs.
Ne me laisse pas opprimer par des
impies.
123 Mais j'aime ta loi, car elle est
mon salut.
Et après la promesse de ta justice.
124 Agis comme ton serviteur selon ta
bonté.
Et rempense-moi tes miséricordes.
125 De tout cœur j'observe tes préceptes.
126 Et ton salut est mon espoir.
127 Et ton salut est mon espoir.

PSAUMES 119, 120

119 Non, non, je ne suis pas un indigne.
A cause des lois de ta justice.
Et je m'occupe de plus pour ceux
qui sont ta loi.
120 Mon espoir est en toi, Seigneur.
Car tu es mon salut, ô Dieu!
J'observe tes commandements.
Mais ton âme observe les préceptes,
et les aime beaucoup.
Et garde tes ordonnances et tes
statuts.
121 Tous tes vœux sont devant
toi.
122 Que mon en parvienne jusqu'à
toi, ô Dieu!
123 Donne-moi l'intelligence, selon ta
promesse.
124 Que ma supplication arrive jus-
qu'à toi.
125 Délivre-moi, selon ta promesse.
126 Que mes lèvres publient ta lou-
ange.
Car tu m'as enseigné tes statuts.
127 Que ma langue chante ta pa-
roie.
Car tous tes commandements sont
justes.
128 Que ta main me soit en aide!
Car j'ai choisi tes ordonnances.
129 Je soupire après ton salut, ô Dieu!
Et tu es la fin de mes délices.
130 Que mon âme vive et qu'elle te
loue.
Et que tes jugements me soutien-
nent.
131 Je suis errant comme une brebis
perdue: cherche ton serviteur,
Car je n'oublie point tes commande-
ments.

PSAUMES 120

120 "Chant des degrés".
David.
121 Mon âme est en détresse, c'est à
Dieu que je crie, et il m'exauce.
122 En ton salut, Seigneur, mon âme de la terre
s'élève.
123 Car ta langue transgresse.
124 Que ta langue transgresse!
125 Que ta langue transgresse!
126 Que ta langue transgresse!
127 Que ta langue transgresse!