



# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GODPARENTS?

As Attila the Hun and his hordes swept toward Paris, St. Genevieve encouraged the people to pray and do penance. The young woman was well known to the Parisians. She had exhibited remarkable piety at an early age and had come to live with her godmother in Paris. She cared for the poor, experienced a miraculous prayer life, and was tasked by the local bishop to care for the consecrated virgins of the city. Now she pleaded with the people to surrender their lives to Providence.

Her pleadings were heard by heaven, and Attila and his hordes left Paris unharmed. For this — any many other incredible deeds — she was later declared the patron saint of Paris and continues to intercede and care for the city she so loved.

A small part of Genevieve's narrative is the quiet role played by her godmother, Lutetia, who cared for her after her parents died. Lutetia helped raise a saint. The good godmother invites us to consider the role godparents play in raising godchildren to be a holy men and women of God.

The godparents' purpose is to help the child attain heaven. Godparents are selected by the parents of a child to be baptized. Pursuant to the law of the Church, a godparent (or sponsor) must, in pertinent part, **"be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on"** (Can. 874 §1.3).

The role or "function" of godparents cannot be reduced to some social award. Parents should not feel obligated to select a favorite family member or friend; rather, they ought to seek partners who will join with them in this earthly pilgrimage to help their child attain heaven. The godparents will publicly affirm their commitment to help the parents in their Christian duty to raise the child in accordance with true religion.

## WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF THE GODPARENTS?

The duties of a godparent are simple: be holy so that you may help lead your godchild into holiness. As with the case of St. Genevieve, there is a tradition that godparents will raise the child if the parents die. Whether to follow such a tradition is at the parents' discretion. What is expected by the Church is that the godparents exhibit the virtues necessary to flourish in their purpose. The godparents should live a life of holiness, in obedience to the Church. As Genevieve cared for Paris, so too do the godparents help their godchild attain what is good and avoid what is evil.

The godparent is a spiritual mentor and should be an exemplar of Catholic virtue in both word and deed. As the child matures, it will be important for him to see someone — other than his parents — who treats spiritual goods as the highest goods in this life. As Pope St. Paul VI warned, the gap between the gospel and the culture is growing. Parents benefit greatly from godparents who will be a light and guide, like the candle lit at baptism, to their child.

Godparents are tasked with assisting the parents in raising the child to be a saint, but unlike the parents, the godparents most commonly do not see the child every day. In fact, godparents may interact with their godchild rather infrequently. How, then, can the godparents best carry out these duties? Overall, one of the most important factors is intentionality. Godparents should be about making time for their godchild and about the spiritual goods in his life.

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