

BAPTISMAL SPONSORS-ROLE OF FAITH... Recently, a young man who graduated from Catholic school several years ago came to see me about being a sponsor at a baptism. Naturally, this is a great honor for the person being chosen for this important role. The young man, like many persons today, did not really understand what being a godparent is all about. I asked him if he attended Mass each Sunday. He honestly replied, "No, Father I really don't. But I do go to the chapel sometimes and say a prayer and light some candles." Well, I told him that he needed to do more than this in order to be a sponsor; that he should be attending Mass each Sunday and be a practicing Catholic. He assured me that he would try his best to get to Mass on Sunday; and I gave him the sponsor certificate-hopefully, he will strive to do that and keep his word! Being a sponsor at a baptism is more than just a nice thing to do for a relative or friend. It is a Role of Faith, something that may not really be understood or grasped today. The prospective god- father or godmother should be practicing their Catholic faith because they are meant to help the parents of the child in their spiritual responsibilities. Godparents should assist in leading the child to profess the faith and to do this by living it out themselves. How can someone assume such a role if they are not participating in the Eucharist every Sunday and neglecting the sacraments? Other requirements to be a sponsor include being fully initiated into the Catholic Church. This means that the person chosen should have already received their Holy Communion and Confirmation. Finally, the Code of Canon Law tells us that a sponsor should not be less than sixteen years of age. Often times, priests may be accused of being "uptight" if they refuse to allow people to serve in the role of sponsor. And yet, the Church has a right to say "no" if it is felt that a prospective sponsor is not fit for that role. If such a person is not practicing their Catholic faith, when a priest discusses the matter with them, it can be a "teachable moment" in their own faith development. Considering that Mass attendance is so very poor among all Catholics today (just under 30% go to Mass on Sunday) not many people by the definition of the Church Law could serve as sponsors. So we try to convince them to attend Mass on Sunday and participate in the life of the Catholic Church. At a certain point in the Baptismal Ceremony, the priest turns toward the godparents and asks them, "Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian mothers and fathers?" And of course, the sponsors readily answer is "We Are!" The positive response means that they are accepting the responsibility of helping to train that child in the ways of the Catholic Faith-so they should be living that faith out themselves!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome