

## **ON GODPARENTS: From the Counsels of Fr. Cleopa of Romania**

“Fr. Cleopa, how should one go about choosing Godparents for a baptism and (sponsors) for a wedding, and what are the obligations that Godparents have for their Godchildren?”

Godparents should be chosen from among the most serious and pious of Orthodox Christians, regardless of what their social standing may be, for the Godparents are the spiritual guides for the Godchildren and have a greater responsibility than the biological parents. A Godparent must be a moderate person, of good moral character, gentle, and a good example in the society in which one dwells. He should know the Orthodox faith well, be faithful to the Creed, knowledgeable of Orthodox catechism and Holy Scripture and should attend church regularly.

This is why it is not permitted to have Godparents at a baptism or wedding (sponsors) who are of another faith or who are not married in the Church, nor those who are sexually immoral, who refuse to bear children in their marriage, are drunkards, divorced, or who have a bad reputation. A great deal of care must be used in choosing Godparents, and the choice must be approved by the parish priest since it is before him that they will vow to care for and instruct the Godchildren in the fear of God, promising to watch over them, bring them to church, be sure that they confess their sins, and strive in virtuous deeds. The Godparents are to regularly visit the Godchildren in their home, admonishing the child [no matter what the age] when necessary, and giving them Orthodox books to read, for the Godparents have a tremendous responsibility as the guarantor of the child both before God and men.

The Godparent forms a bond with the Godchild and the parents of the child "through a spiritual relationship, which surpasses the relationship of flesh, since he is the spiritual father" according to Canon 53 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. St. Dionysius the Areopagite says “the parents according to the flesh entrust the child to a baptized Christian who is a good teacher in spiritual things, since the child will be under that person’s direction for his entire life, as a spiritual father and a guarantor of that person’s life to God...” The Godparent should live as close as possible to the Godchild in order to guide and assist in teaching him the commandments of God.

Briefly, this is how one should chose a Godparent for baptism, marriage and for monastic profession. Godparents should be of the highest character of Orthodox people, for they are the ones who will answer before God for the soul of the Godchild. We can even say that many faithful Godparents find salvation for their own souls through the way that they raise their Godchildren in the fear of God; but most find condemnation instead, because of the fact that they are lazy and careless regarding the soul of their Godchildren.

For their part, the Godchildren are obligated to obey their Godparents who have taken responsibility for their souls. The Godchild should consult the Godparent in all matters, accepting their wise guidance, and must pray daily for their Godparents, for the priest who baptized (married or professed) them, and the Godchild should strive to be a model of spirituality his entire life.

...Laymen can only have laymen as Godparents for their marriage and/or baptism. This is according to the Rules of Matthew Basarabov, chapter 135, which states, “It is neither fitting nor honorable for a monk or nun to be a Godparent at Holy Baptism for a child, nor to bear the crown (as a sponsor) at a wedding. If a monk or nun should be so brazen to take upon himself to be a Godparent, he is shameless and fallen into transgression and must be disciplined by the bishop. If he should then repeat this (i.e. become a Godparent) a second time, then he is excommunicated from the Church of Christ as one who tramples upon the divine canons.” *From the new book, Elder Cleopa of Sihastria*

*To Summarize the above, a prospective Godparent:*

- Must be an Orthodox Christian of good standing in his/her parish
- Must live according to the Orthodox Faith and Creed
- Must consider this new relationship to be of the highest and most profound nature. It is NOT an honorary title
- Must pray for his Godchild daily, visit the Godchild regularly, remembering the nameday and other important occasions
- Must have the blessing of the priest to serve as a Godparent before the baptism, chrismation, or wedding
- Must have ready a cross and a candle before the service
- Must not be related by blood to the god-child; therefore, do not choose a Godparent that you may someday, somehow come to marry
- Do not choose Godparents that may someday wish to marry each other, since they will be already related by the Baptism
- Do not choose a Godparent that is the brother, sister, grandmother or blood relation to the child
- Do not choose a Godparent that may someday wish to marry the parent of the Godchild
- Individuals with the same Godparent may not marry, since they are related by baptism to each other
- A Godparent's child may not marry the parent of the Godchild

How strict is one to be with the above rules? As strict as possible, of course, yet one should remember that sometimes, in some specific occasions, exceptions are made for the good management (called *economia*) of the parish and the families involved. Ask your priest or bishop.