

# Conservative Catholic?

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May 5, 2016



**Q: I go to school in another part of the state. Some of my professors told me that the Diocese of Duluth is a “conservative” diocese. What does that mean?**

A: In my experience, some people will use the term “liberal” to describe someone who isn’t as concerned with the “teachings of the Church” and more concerned with the common good: the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Usually, these same people will describe as “conservative” those people who are rigid when it comes to belief; they hold as inviolable the doctrines of the Church and are interested in the needs of others in a merely abstract way (“Yeah...care for the oppressed...that’s one of the doctrines I support...”), but don’t necessarily do anything about it.

Ultimately, these are merely political terms that do little to address the life to which the Church calls us.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that a person of faith is someone who “completely submits his intellect and his will to God” (CCC 143). Faith involves right belief, but it also involves right action. Our hearts must be near Christ, our thoughts and beliefs must be formed by the teaching of the Church, and our actions must flow from this submission of heart and mind.

A word that could possibly capture the depth of the Catholic man or woman’s submission (placing one’s self “under the mission” of Christ and the Church) is the word “disciple”. A disciple is more than a “student”, because following Christ is more than simply believing what He has taught (and continues to teach through His Church). In addition, a disciple is more than an “activist” because discipleship involves sitting at the feet of the Master and allowing Him to form your thoughts and heart.

A good disciple must be like a tree. A tree has to be rooted. It must also grow up straight, bear fruit, and multiply. All of these elements must be present for a good tree. Without good roots, a strong wind or lack of water will destroy even the tallest tree. Without a solid and straight trunk, the tree lacks a certain “goodness” proper to trees. If a tree does not bear fruit, it is not accomplishing the reason for its existence. And if a tree fails to multiply, it remains a single tree and its fruit dies with it.

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The same is true for an authentic disciple. Christ made it clear that his disciples must “abide in Him”; we must spend time in deep prayer. This is where the root system must extend wide and deep. The only place these roots are grown is through a commitment to prayer and the Sacraments of the Church. Without this “rootedness”, difficulty or tragedy can empty a person of faith. Of course, a disciple’s life cannot end there, it must grow and this growth must be authentic. It must grow straight.

A disciple’s belief must be orthodox (meaning “right” or “straight” belief). Fidelity to the Church’s teaching is not “conservative”; it is simply Catholic. Not being faithful to the teachings of the Church is not “liberal” or “progressive”, it is heterodox (or worse, heretical). This statement has very little to say about the moral excellence of an individual, it is simply an accurate description of a person’s relationship with the truth as revealed through the Church. But discipleship cannot end here either. A disciple must bear fruit. They must make a difference. When Jesus spoke to the church at Laodicea (Revelation 4), He condemned them because they made no difference. Their belief did nothing to impact the world around them. We must not be impotent Catholics. This is the equivalent of a tree that produces no fruit. It is good for nothing than to be thrown out and burned (cf. John 15:6). A Catholic that does not change his or her world is a dead Catholic. This fruit can be within your family, with

your children, serving the poor, volunteering in your parish, serving meals when families grieve the loss of loved ones, or any number of other ways our faith makes a difference. If my “faith” does not influence what I buy, how I vote, or how I live...what is it good for?

Lastly, we must reproduce. Catholics must spread the Faith. We must work to spread the Kingdom of God. Has anyone in your life come to know the love and joy of Christ and the Church through you? You might not know (a lot of that happens behind the scenes), but are you and I trying to evangelize? Are we trying to help other people come to Jesus? Are we drawing people to the Catholic Church? If not, our faith dies with us.

I pray that the Diocese of Duluth is known for its orthodoxy, but also for its concern and care for each and every person in this Diocese. That we are known for the impact we make on our cities and towns. That the Catholics of the Diocese of Duluth are interested in spreading the Kingdom and multiplying. In essence, I pray that we are known for being Christ’s disciples.