

You hear a lot about “orthodox” churches and priests. How is the typical Catholic to know whether the church they are attending and the priest who presides are orthodox and teaching in a way which conforms to true Catholic doctrine?

I’m glad you used the word “orthodox” which means having right or correct beliefs. Often people get caught up with terms such as conservative vs. liberal, or traditional vs. contemporary. We can have conservative, liberal, traditional, or contemporary approaches to issues as long as we are also orthodox, or correct, in our beliefs and practices.

But how do we know if a priest or parish is orthodox? This is a question I am faced with when I need to select a new parish; one that I faced when I decided to come to Sacred Heart three years ago. So let me share some of my thought processes for my decision. First, I started by attending Mass here on several weekends. I tried to observe signs of reverence by the community and by Fr. Zeke. I saw that the Eucharist was treated with respect. I saw obedience to the gestures and postures prescribed for us and spelled out in the missalette. I came early to Mass and saw the prayerfulness and humility of Father Zeke as he would kneel in the pew and pray prior to Mass. I could tell from his homilies that he cared about people’s souls and their eternal life and was not just telling people what they wanted to hear so that they would like him. I looked at the Sacred Heart website which opened to strains of Ave Maria, and saw these words: *“A Roman Catholic Parish faithful to Pope John Paul II and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.”* (Unfortunately, these words are still on the website; we need to update them to reflect our new pope, Pope Benedict XVI.)

So for starters, I would encourage you to look for signs of reverence, obedience, humility, holiness, and true compassion. Ultimately, we all have a responsibility to learn the basics of our faith and to continue our education. If we hear the priest or deacon preaching something that doesn’t sound right, we need to pick up our catechism and see if what he is saying is unorthodox, i.e. if it contradicts the teachings of the Church.

Deacon Joe