

Is it disrespectful to leave the church before the mass is over? (Even the closing hymn?)

I heard of a parish that had a sign over the door that was visible as you left church. It said: *“Don't forget, Judas also left early.”* While a little extreme, it slowed down those who liked to leave mass early. Spending time in church on Sunday is part of how we obey the 3rd Commandment: *“Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.”* (Ex. 20:8) We should want to be present for the entire mass because *“the entire celebration is planned in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful both in body and in mind”*. (General Instruction on the Roman Missal #18) This includes the closing hymn. St. Paul reminds us of the importance of singing: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”* (Col. 3:16)

Yes, it is disrespectful to leave mass early without a good reason, and we should all give full honor to God and be considerate of each other. But we don't know who has a good reason and who does not, so we must be careful not to sit in judgment of others. Maybe they have to get home to a sick child or spouse, maybe they have to get to work, or maybe they are doing some work of charity. If you are actively and fully participating in singing the final hymn, you probably won't even notice those who have left.

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