

Is it OK to leave Mass after Communion?

by Victoria M. Tufano

No. It's really not. Because it's not just about us.

It's not OK to leave Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's [house] early because it's not just about eating good food, seeing relatives once a year, and letting them see how big (or thin or old or pretty) you've become. It's about family, loving, and being loved, even if—especially if—you and they are not perfect. It's about tradition, hearing the old stories and the new ones and adding yours; it's about recalling the past while the present surrounds you and the future lurks nearby. It's not OK to leave until the dessert and coffee and maybe an after-dinner drink, because it's not just about you; it's about all of you as a family. So you stay until it's [entirely] over, and you say goodbye with hugs and kisses and leave with a renewed understanding of what being part of this family means.

The Mass and Thanksgiving dinner have much in common, but the Mass is so much more. It is our celebration of the paschal mystery; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. We gather as God's family, the church, holy and imperfect, to hear again the story of how God has loved us and pursued us throughout history to this very day. In praying for the whole church and its needs ... for those who suffer and those who die, we learn that we are to be mindful of them and to serve them. As we offer our thanks and praise for all God has done for us and given us, we come to recognize God's greatest gift to us, Jesus Christ, who feeds and strengthens us in the form of bread and wine, the body and blood he gave for the life of the world.

[How many times are we fed from in the Mass? Two: The Table of the Word (sacred scripture) and the Table of the Sacrifice (Holy Eucharist/Communion).]

The Mass not only celebrates our faith, it teaches us what we believe and how we are to live. That is why we can't [just] leave Mass after Communion. Because Communion is not just about us and our salvation. It's about the salvation of the world. In celebrating and receiving the Eucharist, "We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again." Who are we professing our faith to? Not just to ourselves, but to the [whole] world. We become part of the story of how much God loves all people and wants them to know God through Christ.

If we leave Mass before the [priest's final blessing] dismissal, we miss out on celebrating and being taught why we celebrate the Eucharist in the first place. We are fed and strengthened on the Body and Blood of Christ not only for ourselves, but also for all those he gave His life for. We are dismissed from Mass not [just] because it's over, but because we have [covenantal mission] work to do. We are to go [back] into the world to proclaim Christ. And so we stay to the end of Mass to be blessed and commissioned: "Go in [the Peace of Christ]". "Go and announce the gospel of the Lord." "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

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