

Ask Fr. James

What is meant by this prayer at Mass: “Look not on our Sins but on the Faith of your Church?”

During the Mass, just after the Our Father and the doxological conclusion but before the kiss of peace, the celebrant offers the following prayer for peace:

*“Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, **look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church**, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will...”*

In the old order of Mass, this prayer was said *sub secreto* (silently) by the celebrant, wherein the priest asked that the Lord not look upon his own sins (*ne respicias peccata mea*), but the faith of the church faithful gathered. However, with the advent of the new Order of Mass, this petition to God became a prayer petition of all the faithful gathered at the Mass. The celebrant now asks Christ to look away not just from his own sins, but from the sins of all those gathered around the altar, for the sake of the Church’s faith.

The faith of the Church mentioned in this prayer refers to all the faithful of the church. That is, all the members of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, whose reality includes and transcends the local assembly. The Catholic doctrine concerning collective faith is known as universal Church and it cuts across time and space. Thus, we at Mass in our local church are relying on the faith of the entire Church militant (every parishioner at Mass everywhere on earth) and the faith of the entire Church triumphant (the angels and saints at Mass in heaven). That is why we worship as a congregation. Every one’s prayer counts for all the other persons present.

When we pray this prayer at Mass, we admit that as individuals, our faith cannot bear this burden alone; it is weak, inadequate, and prone to fail but the faith of the church collectively, can help deflect the Lord’s judgment on our sins and the sins of the souls in Purgatory awaiting the completion of their purification; all of us together need God not to look on our sins but on the faith of the church combined and because of our union with those who have made it into heaven, we ask the Lord to look favorable upon their faith to help us.

This prayer text reveals Jesus Christ as a mediator for us before God. At Mass, Jesus Christ is the mediator of the church's prayer and sacrifice. Our worship at Mass is a thanksgiving as well as a search for spiritual salvation. It is hard to imagine precisely what the thousands of members of the Church militant and church suffering need prayers to attain salvation.