

# LITURGICAL FORMATION & FOOTPRINTS OF GOD

## The Prayer of humble Access

### "Humble Access" prayer as it appears in the Book of Common Prayer (1662):

*"We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen."*

The "Humble Access" prayer originates in Christian liturgy, specifically in the Anglican tradition. It is part of the traditional Anglican communion service, particularly in the Book of Common Prayer since 1549. The Prayer of Humble Access was Thomas Cranmer's creation. The "Humble Access" prayer is typically included in the communion service, where the congregation or clergy recite it before the reception of Holy Communion. Its origins lie in the healing of the centurion's servant, as recounted in two of the Gospels and based on two passages from the New Testament. One is Matthew 8:8; *"The centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But say the word and my servant will be healed."* The other is found in Mark 7:28. It is a reply from a woman speaking to Jesus regarding her unworthiness, who said, *"But even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"*.

This prayer is a significant part of Anglican worship, reminding worshipers of the grace and mercy of God as they partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Prayer of Humble Access teaches that receiving the body and blood of Christ is a gift, a grace granted to us. We do not "take" the communion; we "receive" it because it is a gift. Through it, we participate in the body of Christ, nourished, cleansed, and renewed in him. We receive the assurance that our life in him is eternal, so we receive a taste of the future in the present. Christian eucharistic theology of the real presence of Christ is stated in this prayer. Over the centuries, Anglicans and

other liturgical traditions have cherished the "Humble Access" prayer for its profound expression of repentance, faith, and dependence on God's grace. It reflects the theological themes of humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation central to Christian worship and spirituality.

Book of Common Prayer places the Prayer of Humble Access after the congregation has said the General Confession and received absolution is considered excessive. Still, I believe that it is vital that although we have confessed our sins, and God has been gracious to us and put them away, this does not somehow "immunise" us against sin: we are still frail creatures in constant need of God's grace. We receive God's gift of the Holy Communion (that is, we are worthy), recognising that we fall short of the glory of God and the goodness that He desires of us (we are unworthy). Overall, the "Humble Access" prayer embodies core Christian teachings about sin, grace, redemption through Christ, and the Church's sacramental life. It is a powerful expression of humility, repentance, and faith, guiding believers to approach God with reverence and gratitude for his mercy and love.

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Written by Rev. Issac Pandianadan,  
(BD, MMin, MA)

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### Reference

1. Anglican Church of Canada, Book of Alternative Services, Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985.
2. Chapman, Mark, *Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford University Press. 2006.
3. Hefling, Charles, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Guide. Guides to Sacred Texts*. London: Oxford University Press. p. 102.
4. <https://anglicancompass.com/the-prayer-of-humble-access/>.