



REVISING APB 1989

UPDATE #7

A PRAYER BOOK FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA
TOMORROW - TODAY
Under Southern Skies – In an African Voice

**What ever happened to the
Prayer of Humble Access?**

**What is the origin
of the Prayer of Humble
Access?**

One of the best-loved and best-known Anglican prayers is the *Prayer of Humble Access*.

This familiar prayer was included in the very first English Eucharistic liturgy, *The Order of Communion*, published in 1548.



¶ Do not presume to come to this thy table (o mercifull lord) trusting in our owne righteousnes, but in thy manifold and great mercies: we be not worthy so much as to gather vp the crumes vnder thy table: but thou art the same lord whose propertie is alwayes to haue mercie: Graunt vs therefore (gracious lord) so to eate the fleche of thy dere sonne Iesus Christ, and to drynke his blood in these holy Mysteries, that we may continually dwell in hym, and he in vs, that our synfull bodies may bee made cleane by his body, and our soules washed through hys most precious blood. Amen.

That Eucharistic devotion was intended to be inserted into the Latin Mass of the day, allowing those who did not understand Latin to enter the Eucharistic celebration by means of their participation in this English insertion into the Latin Mass.

The *Order of Communion* contained an *Invitation to Confession* [Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins], *Confession* and *Absolution*, followed by *The Comfortable Words*. These devotions allowed the faithful, who had no clue about what was being said to them and on their behalf in the Latin Mass, to Confess their sins, be Absolved of them, and hear the kernel of the Gospel in the Comfortable Words. Thus prepared, the faithful then said, in English, the Prayer of Humble Access.

In the 1548 liturgy, the *Prayer of Humble Access* was a set in a very appropriate place in a larger liturgy that was not ‘understood of the people.’

What happened to *The Prayer of Humble Access* over the years?

Over the centuries our liturgy became a completely English liturgy – and was no longer a Latin one - and then became, in addition, a liturgy that was celebrated the local languages spoken and understood by the people where ever they were. Consequently *The Order of Communion* became superfluous – it was replaced by a full and complete Eucharistic liturgy.

Consequently the elements of *The Order of Communion* were no longer needed as separate elements to be inserted into the Eucharistic celebration. By the time of the revisions of the Prayer Books of the Anglican Communion in the 1960-70s, the *Prayer of Humble Access* had come to be considered an unnecessary prayer that was most inappropriately placed following the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Each of the Eucharistic Prayers in *APB 1989* - and most of those in use in the Anglican Communion today - affirms that in Christ we have been made worthy to stand in God's presence and serve God, worthy to make offering to God and worthy to receive the Holy Sacrament:

Gracious Lord, accept us in him [Christ], unworthy though we are ...

First Eucharistic Prayer APB 1989

Accept through him, our great high priest this our sacrifice of thanks and praise ... as we eat and drink these holy gifts in the presence of our divine majesty ...

Second Eucharistic Prayer APB 1989

We thank you Lord, for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you. ...

Third Eucharistic Prayer APB 1989

We bring offer/bring before you this bread and this cup, giving thanks that you have made us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you. ... *Fourth Eucharistic Prayer APB 1989*

While the *Prayer of Humble Access* is no longer an obligatory part of the Eucharist, [you will notice that in *APB 1989* it is given a number in brackets, making its inclusion in the Eucharistic liturgy optional] it is a venerable Anglican prayer that should not be lost to our devotions.

It is clear that the *Prayer of Humble Access* is a worthy and wonderful prayer that has landed up in the wrong place. For this reason *Celebrating Sunday*, the new collection of supplemental experimental liturgical materials for trial use, provides a selection of *Prayers before Worship*. These are commended to the Church. Pray them as you prepare for worship, and note that the *Prayer of Humble Access* is offered as the first of these preparatory prayers.

This Update was written by The Very Reverend Bruce W. B. Jenneker

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