

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AS THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The term “*Communion of Saints*” (*Communion Sanctorum*) was introduced in the West by the Apostolic Creed and is unknown in the Eastern Orthodox Church. It reveals, on the one hand, its basis of solidarity and the relationship that must uphold the members of the Militant Church together, whereas it manifests on the other hand, the relationship and communication between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant in Heaven. This relationship is based upon unselfish Love and is expressed by mutual compassion, assistance and encouragement of the Faithful through the prayers and intercessions of the Saints in Heaven.

#### 1. The Term “*Communion of Saints*”

The term “*Communion of Saints*” (*Communion Sanctorum*) was first used to signify the common participation and Communion of the Faithful in the Holy things.<sup>1</sup> It was used in one fragment of interpretation of the Apostolic Creed, which was commonly accepted in the West. It was believed that Nicetas, Bishop of Remeziana (about 375 AD), introduced this term. After the fourth century the term was used in the French churches, either because of the influence of the Catechesis of St Cyril of Jerusalem or because of Nicetas’ writings that were influenced by St. Cyril’s Catechesis.<sup>2</sup> In the Eastern Orthodox Church the Apostolic Creed remained unknown while the Nicene Creed (Nicene-Constantinople) prevailed. “*The ‘Communion of Saints’ of the Church is the Alpha and Omega of all the creative Economia of God.*”<sup>3</sup>

The union of each member with Christ within this Communion that perfects their unity and solidarity, is achieved through faith in Christ and the renunciation of one’s old self, thoughts, intentions, desires and, generally speaking, through the new Supernatural Life, which leads to Theosis (Deification) in Christ. The more we separate ourselves from our egoistical demands and desires, the more we form Christ within us. We become more harmonious and equal to one another. According to the Lord’s Prayer the Faithful must consist of a unity undivided, internal and solid, consistent with the Prototype of the unity between Christ and His Father. Through the unity between them and the Holy Trinity, as our Lord said, “...that they may be one in Us...”<sup>4</sup> and thus become “...partakers of the Divine Nature.”<sup>5</sup> Christ, by referring to Himself as “the True Vine,”<sup>6</sup> regards those who believe in Him as being like branches that are inseparably dependant and united to one and same Root, which nourishes them with Divine Grace, thereby strengthening them and making them spiritually fruitful. Thus, all the Faithful, being united with Christ and through Christ to one another, achieve “...that which is said in the Book of Acts, that ‘...all who believed were together...’ with one heart and one soul, and no one stood on his own will, but ‘...all had all

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<sup>1</sup> *Explanatio symboli*, n. 10, in migne, *P.L.*, 52, 871. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 235-237.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bernad, “de Theologie”, v. III, p. 450. Briggs, *Symbolics*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> John 17:21.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 1:4.

<sup>6</sup> John 15:1-8.

*things in common...’<sup>7</sup> living together in the Holy Spirit and under the one Will of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>*

The uprooting of the egoism by each individual and his Regeneration in Christ consists of a Work **that** requires continuous struggle and effort. Without these **endeavours** the Faith **that** leads us to Christ could be corrupted or fade away. Then **we find ourselves in a state of** complete alienation or separation from the Unity and Love **of the Church**. This is why St Paul presented the Faithful as continuously growing up “...in all things into Him **Who is the Head...**”<sup>9</sup> “...until we all come to the Unity of the Faith and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

According to the **mentioned**, the main characteristic **and manifestation** of the Communion of Saints is the strengthening **of** True Faith and the Unity of Oneness of Mind and Love. This is what St Paul meant when writing to the Ephesians, **exhorting them to strive** “...to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace...”<sup>11</sup> proclaiming that the Unity “...which the Spirit unites...” “...those who are different in kind and manner...” is also preserved through Peace that consists of the bond “...by which we are united to one another and to God.” The strengthening of True Faith **in** the living Members of the Communion of Saints **is due to the fact that** they pray together, one for the other “...through mutual Faith...”<sup>12</sup> and each one, seeing the Faith of the other, **is** “...comforted and rejoices and supported.”<sup>13</sup> **Furthermore**, they share the Knowledge of the Saving Truth admonishing,<sup>14</sup> teaching, preaching and warning one another **so** “...that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all Wisdom, Teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs, singing with Grace in your hearts to the Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

This solidarity of the Members, which is shown at first as compassion towards the suffering **and ill whereby** the strong **uphold those** “...weak in faith...”<sup>17</sup> with humility, **mourns** the fall of others.<sup>18</sup> **Therefore they teach those in error** with “...a spirit of gentleness...”<sup>19</sup> working together **with love**. **They become** servants “to all”<sup>20</sup> in order to “...heal the souls of those who are ill.”<sup>21</sup> Secondly, this solidarity is shown in the use of the Charismata (**Gifts**) in the service to others and the common **structure** of the Church “...for the equipping of the

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:44.

<sup>8</sup> St. Basil the Great, *About the judgment of God*, ch. 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 660.

<sup>9</sup> Ephes. 4:15.

<sup>10</sup> Ephes. 4:13. St. Basil the Great, *About the judgment of God*, ch. 4, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 660. Kalogeras, *Maria*, II, p. 36. St. Ecumenius, *To Ephesians 4:15*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 118, 1221. St. John of Damascus, *To Ephesians*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 95, 844.

<sup>11</sup> Ephes. 4:3.

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 1:12.

<sup>13</sup> Kalogeras, *Maria*, II, p. 36. Ibid, *Maria*, I, p. 12. St. John Chrysostom, *To Ephesians*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 63, 73. Theophylactus of Bulgaria, *Epistle to Romans 1:12*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 124, 348. St. Basil the Great, *Epistle 90*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 473.

<sup>14</sup> Rom. 15:14. 2 Thess. 3:15.

<sup>15</sup> Col. 1:28. 1 Thess. 5:14.

<sup>16</sup> Col. 3:16. St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homilies 31, §§ 3, 4; and 32, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 261-263. Ibid, *To Ephesians*, Homily 11, §§ 1 and 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Rom 14:1.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinth. 5:2. 2 Corinth. 12:21.

<sup>19</sup> Gal. 6:1. Kalogeras, *Maria*, I, p. 278.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinth. 9:19.

<sup>21</sup> Kalogeras, *Maria*, I, p. 278.

*Saints for the Work of Ministry...*” and “... for the edifying of the Body of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Having an excess of Charisma is difficult and demands more **effort** for the sake of others.<sup>23</sup> Thirdly, this solidarity is shown **by our** Prayers for one another.

## **2. Prayers for One Another as an Expression of Solidarity According to Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers**

The fact that Prayers for one another are seriously expressed, the solidarity and help for **each** another is understood when one takes **into** consideration, on the one hand, that through these Prayers those who are in charge can “...*through extensive Prayer to the Lord assist...*” those Brethren who are in danger,<sup>24</sup> whereas, on the other hand, that even from the Old Testament Prayers for one another **were introduced** as in the case of Abraham who “...*standing before the Lord...*” asked Him about the Salvation of any Righteous **in** the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha **should any** be found.<sup>25</sup> **Furthermore**, Moses prayed to calm the Anger of God against the Israelites<sup>26</sup> and likewise Samuel prayed “...*to the Lord.*”<sup>27</sup> In the New Testament our Lord Jesus Christ Commands **us to** address our Prayers to the Heavenly God, **addressing** Him as “...*our Father...*”<sup>28</sup> **because we are** members **of one** and same Family. St Paul not only addressed Prayers for all those to whom he **wrote**<sup>29</sup> but he also **sought** their Prayers<sup>30</sup> and advised them **to always pray** “...*with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the Saints.*”<sup>31</sup> And St James, the Brother of **our Lord Jesus**, urged the Faithful to Confess their trespasses “...*to one another and pray for one another...*” **so** that they “...*may be healed...*” for “...*the effective, fervent Prayer of a Righteous man avails much.*”<sup>32</sup>

St Clement of Rome recommended Prayer “...*for those who are involved in some transgression, that forbearance and humility may be given them, so that they may submit, not to us but to the Will of God. For in this way the merciful remembrance of them in the Presence of God and the Saints will be fruitful and perfect for them.*”<sup>33</sup> He urged us again to “...*ask, with earnest Prayer and Supplication, that the Creator of the Universe may keep intact the specified number of His Elect throughout the whole world, through His Beloved Servant Jesus*<sup>34</sup> *Christ, through Whom He Called us from darkness to Light, from ignorance to the Knowledge of the Glory of His Name.*”<sup>35</sup> He also **recommended** us to ask the “...*Master to be our Helper and Protector...*” to “...*Save those among us who are in distress, have Mercy on the humble; raise up the fallen; show Thyself to those in need; Heal the godless; turn back those of Thy people who wander; Feed the hungry; release our prisoners; raise up the weak; Comfort the discouraged. Let all the nations know that **Thou art** the Only*

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<sup>22</sup> Ephes. 4:12.

<sup>23</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Ephesians*, Homily 11, §§ 1-2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 81-82.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Gen. 18:23-33.

<sup>26</sup> Ex. 32:11-14.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Samuel (1 Kings) 7:5 and 12:19.

<sup>28</sup> Matth. 6:9.

<sup>29</sup> Rom. 1:9.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 15:30. 2 Corinth. 1:11. Phil. 1:19. Philem. 22. Col. 4:2-4. 2 Thess. 3:1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Ephes. 6:18.

<sup>32</sup> James 5:16.

<sup>33</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 56, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Acts 4:27.

<sup>35</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 59, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 61.

God, that Jesus Christ is Thy Servant, and that we are Thy people and the sheep of Thy Pasture.”<sup>36</sup>

St Ignatius the Theophoros **besought** the Romans to pray for him **so** that “...through these instruments (the wild beasts) I might prove to be a Sacrifice to God...”<sup>37</sup> and that he “...may reach the Goal.”<sup>38</sup> He also **admonished** them to “remember” in their prayers “...the Church in Syria, which has God for its Shepherd...” in his place. “Jesus Christ alone will be its Bishop – as will your Love.”<sup>39</sup> With the same spirit he **wrote** to the Ephesians: “...Let nothing appeal to you apart from Him in Whom I carry these chains (my spiritual pearls!), by which I hope, through your Prayers, to rise again...”<sup>40</sup> “...Pray continually for the rest of mankind as well, that they may find God, for there is in them hope for Repentance.”<sup>41</sup>

In the “*Didache*” the Faithful are urged to pray “...for the Church...” that the Lord will deliver Her “...from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy Love; and gather it **together**, the One that has been Sanctified, from the four winds into Thy Kingdom, which Thou hast prepared for it.”<sup>42</sup>

St Polycarp of Smyrna recommended that the Philippians: “Pray for all the Saints.”<sup>43</sup> Pray for kings and powers and rulers, and for those who persecute and hate you,<sup>44</sup> and for the enemies of the Cross<sup>45</sup> in order that your Fruit may be evident among all people, that you may be perfect in Him.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the praying of the Christians for one another is an act of duty **that** is witnessed by all the Apostolic Fathers. At the time of the Apologists, St Justin, the Philosopher and Martyr mentioned that the Christians used to pray and fast together with the Catechumens. They prayed **not only for themselves but also for others** to be guided in Faith.<sup>47</sup>

Tertullian described **repentant sinners who besought the Faithful** with warm tears to remember them in their Prayers during the Divine Eucharist.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 59, 4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 61-62. The preceding prayer is a pastiche of Old Testament quotations; sources include: Num. 27. Deut. 32. I Samuel (1 Kings) 2. I Kings (3 Kings) 8. 2 Kings (4 Kings) 5; 19. Job 5. Psalms 31(32), 78(79), 94(95), 99(100), 118(119). Is. 13; 57. Ezek. 36. Judith. 9. Sir. 16. Ephes. 1. For more details see Lightfoot, *AF*, Part I, 2, pp. 172-175. Richardson, *Fathers*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> St. Ignatius, *To Romans*, 4, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.103.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, *To Romans*, 8, 3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.105.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, *To Romans*, 9, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.105.

<sup>40</sup> St. Ignatius, *To Ephesians*, 11, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.90.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, *To Ephesians*, 10, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.105.

<sup>42</sup> *Didache*, 10, § 5, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.155.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Eph. 6:18.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Matth. 5:44 and Luke 6:27.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Phil. 3:18.

<sup>46</sup> St. Polycarp, *To Philippians*, 12, 3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p.129.

<sup>47</sup> St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *Apology I*, 61 and 65, in *B*, v. 3, pp. 194 and 197. *Ibid*, *Dialogue*, 35, § 7, in *B*, v. 3, p. 239.

<sup>48</sup> Tertullian, *De poenitentia*. 10, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 1366. *Ibid*, *De oratione*, 3, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 1258.

### 3. The Solidarity Between the Militant and **Triumphant** Church

As we have mentioned **before**, the **Triumphant** Church in Heaven is part of the Militant Church on earth. Death is unable to **disrupt** the relationship of the Militant Church or to dull the feelings of love and compassion of the **living towards** their brethren.<sup>49</sup> Origen correctly observed that “...*the chief of all Virtues...*” according to the words of Christ is “...*the love towards our neighbour.*” It is necessary to **remember** that those Saints who have fallen asleep have more love “...*towards those who still struggle in life...*” than **for** those who “...*are still in the human weakness and co-struggling with the lowest.*”<sup>50</sup> It is natural then, that we have **a relationship** with them since the **bonds** of Love between them and us are not abolished but **rather strengthened** and exalted because of the separation. Consequently, between the **Triumphant** and Militant Church **a mutual relationship** exists, which is manifested mainly in the Prayers **of one another**.

In **many Eastern Orthodox** Prayers, it is **evident** that the Divine Eucharist is offered, not **merely in general** for **all who** have fallen asleep, **such as the** “...*Patriarchs, Prophets, Martyrs, Confessors...*” **and** “...*especially for our Most Blessed and Ever Virgin Mary, the Glorious Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist, the Holy and glorious Apostles...*” but also for all **others** who have departed this life.

No one can **deny** that **the** Commemoration of those who **have become** perfect and Sanctified is done **triumphantly**, with gratitude for the Grace and Glory offered by God to His Saints. The Orthodox Church highlights Saints as being the Victorious and Glorious Army of the Lord for whom **His** Sacrifice on the Cross was not offered in vain.

St John Chrysostom determined the meaning under which the Eucharist is offered for the Martyrs and all **other** Saints. “*Even if they are Martyrs...*” he said “... *it is a great honour to be mentioned as the Master is present. As when the victories of the kings are led, then all those who participated in the victory are also praised.*”<sup>51</sup>

As the Militant Church expresses Her Love and Her unbreakable **bonds with** the **Triumphant** Church, likewise, hoping upon that bond of Love, She **relies** on the Prayers of the Saints in Heaven, which are nothing else **than** the Prayers of the **Triumphant** Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ assured us that “...*there is Joy in the Presence of the Angels of God over one sinner who repents.*”<sup>52</sup> This **clearly demonstrates the interest** of those who are in Heaven **in** those who are **still** struggling on earth under the Flag (the Cross) of Christ. Holy Scripture repeatedly refers to Angels who present “...*the remembrance of Prayer...*” of **those** on earth “...*before the Holy One...*”<sup>53</sup> **as well as** “... *golden bowls full of incense, which are the Prayers of the Saints.*”<sup>54</sup> “*Then another Angel, having a golden Censer, came and stood at the Altar. He was given much incense that he should offer it with the Prayers of all the Saints upon the golden Altar which was before the Throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the Prayers of the Saints, ascended before God from the Angel’s hand.*”<sup>55</sup> The saints who have **reposed** pray to God for Israel. “*Onias, who had been High Priest, a virtuous and a good man, reverend in*

<sup>49</sup> Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 244-245.

<sup>50</sup> Origen, *About prayer*, 11, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 11, 449.

<sup>51</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Acts*, Homily 21, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 170.

<sup>52</sup> Luke 15:10.

<sup>53</sup> Tobit 12:12.

<sup>54</sup> Rev. 5:8.

<sup>55</sup> Rev. 8:3-4.

conversation, gentle in condition, well spoken also, and exercised from a child in all points of Virtue, holding up his hands, prayed for the whole body of the Jews. This done, in like manner there appeared a man with gray hairs, and exceeding glorious, who was of a wonderful and excellent majesty. Then Onias answered, saying: 'This is a lover of the brethren, who prayed much for the people, and for the Holy City, to wit, Jeremiah the Prophet of God.' Whereupon Jeremiah holding forth his right hand gave to Judas a Sword of gold and in giving it spoke thus: 'Take this Holy Sword, a Gift from God, with which you shall wound the adversaries.'<sup>56</sup> Henceforth Origen, based upon **these** verses, concluded that "...not only the High Priest..." and Lord Jesus Christ "...prays with those who purely pray..." but **furthermore** "...in Heaven, the Angels rejoice for the Repentance of one sinner..." "...and also the souls of the Saints who had fallen asleep."<sup>57</sup>

This is something natural for those who have **reposed because**, when they were alive on this earth, they **besought** the Prayers of their companions within the Militant Church, praying for them **as well**. It is then natural too that when they departed this life, they did not forget nor cease to ask for whatever they prayed for and thus they fulfilled this Act as their brotherly duty. "The souls of those who have fallen asleep, when separated from their bodies through death, are not overcome by some kind of lethargy, hence it is obvious that it is impossible **for** the members of the **Triumphant** Church to be unconscious of the needs and sufferings of the Church on earth."<sup>58</sup>

Concerning the question of **how it is possible for the Saints in Heaven to be informed of our needs or to have knowledge of our Prayers and Petitions**, it is commonly accepted that "...although they (the Saints) by their own do not know, nor hear our Prayers, but nevertheless through Revelation and Divine Grace which God **richly** granted them, they know and hear..."<sup>59</sup> **which is similar to** the Prophets who, while "...being in the body ... knew the things in Heaven through which they foretold the things to come."<sup>60</sup> For the Holy Saints of the Orthodox Church this **manner** of communication is the Revelation of the All-present and All-knowing Holy Spirit Who reveals to His servants whatever He wishes<sup>61</sup> **them to know**.

Christ is the only "...Mediator between God and man."<sup>62</sup> He is the only One Who can mediate directly **for us with** God the Father. **However**, we do not call upon the Saints as Mediators, but **rather** as Ambassadors and Supplicants to God. And we do not call upon them as gods, but as our Brethren and friends of God **who request** Divine **Assistance** for us. **That does not imply** that they help us by **means of** their own power, nor that God **owes them something as He certainly does not owe anyone anything at all**. **Instead they are able to assist us only** according to the **honesty with** which God has **granted them** according to His Great Mercy and Love.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, this Invocation is based upon the obligation that the Faithful have to pray for one another and upon the God-inspired assurance that the "...*fervent Prayer of a Righteous man avails much*."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>56</sup> II Macc. 15:12-16.

<sup>57</sup> Origen, *About prayer*, 11, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 11, 448.

<sup>58</sup> Kritopoulos, in Karmires, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 548.

<sup>59</sup> Mogilas, III, 52, in Karmires, *Ta The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 679.

<sup>60</sup> Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, Term VIII, in Karmires, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 751.

<sup>61</sup> Kritopoulos, *Confession*, ch. 17, in Karmires, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 549.

<sup>62</sup> 1 Tim. 2:5.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, Term VIII; Kritopoulos, *Confession*, ch. 17; Mogilas, III, 52, in Karmires, *The dogmatics*, v. II, pp. 751, 549 and 679.

<sup>64</sup> James 5:16.

Hence the beneficial influence of the Triumphant Church supports the Militant Church on earth. However, it cannot overcome the limits of the influence and help of one another that is manifested by the members of Christ from their Communion. Consequently, those in Heaven recognise those who are worthy of God's favour while they cannot assist anyone who is alienated from God. Only those who are worthy and who faithfully serve God may receive their intercessory Prayers and assistance. Therefore myriads of Holy Powers pray together with those who, with good will, pray to God for Higher Things.<sup>65</sup> In the public Prayers of the Faithful, not only Christ our Lord and Saviour is present but also the Angelic Powers as well as the souls of the Saints and those who have fallen asleep. The Presence of the Angelic World can be understood when one remembers that there is a Guardian Angel for each Faithful who has been entrusted to guard and to protect them.<sup>66</sup> Thus, together with the Faithful who gather together in Prayer, their Guardian Angels also gather so that in the gathering of the Saints there is a double gathering of the Church, which consists of both mankind and Angels.<sup>67</sup>

According to the Teachings of the Orthodox Church concerning Guardian Angels we conclude that the Saints in Heaven and generally the members of the Church Triumphant pray for their Brethren on earth, invisibly and silently encouraging, strengthening and urging them in their struggle against sin. Although they manifest their favour and care for them under no circumstances can they transmit Grace to them from their own Grace. Saints do not possess Divine Grace due to their own nature. It is bestowed upon the Faithful only by Christ Who grants the Treasures of Grace unrestricted and sufficiently by means of which not only we on earth but even the Perfected Just in Heaven are Saved.

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<sup>65</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, XIII, 64, in **B**, v. 10, p. 222.

<sup>66</sup> Psalm 33(34):7. Gen. 48:16.

<sup>67</sup> Origen, *About prayer*, 31, 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 11, 553.