

QUESTION 178

The Grace of Miracles

Next we have to consider the grace of miracles. On this topic there are two questions: (1) Is there such a thing as a gratuitously given grace of working miracles? (2) Whom does this grace benefit?

Article 1

Is there any gratuitously given grace that is ordered toward working miracles?

It seems that there is no gratuitous grace that is ordered toward working miracles:

Objection 1: Every grace posits something in the individual to whom it is given. But the working of miracles does not posit anything in the soul of a man to whom it is given, since miracles are worked even at the touch of a dead body; for instance, we read in 4 Kings 13:21 that certain individuals threw a cadaver “into Elisha’s sepulcher, and when it had touched Elisha’s bones, the man came back to life and stood up on his feet.” Therefore, the working of miracles does not involve a gratuitously given grace.

Objection 2: Gratuitously given graces are from the Holy Spirit—this according to 1 Corinthians 12:4 (“The graces are many, but the same Spirit”). But the working of miracles comes from unclean spirits as well—this according to Matthew 24:24 (“False christs and false prophets will arise, and they will produce great signs and wonders”). Therefore, it seems that the working of miracles does not involve a gratuitously given grace.

Objection 3: Miracles are divided into (a) *signs (signa)*, (b) *wonders*, i.e., *portents (prodigia sive portenta)*, and (c) *miracles of power (virtutes)*. Therefore, it is inappropriate for the working of miracles of power to be posited as a gratuitously given grace rather than the working of wonders or the working of signs.

Objection 4: The miraculous restoration of health is done by God’s power. Therefore the grace of healing should not be distinguished from working miracles of power.

Objection 5: The working of miracles follows upon faith—either (a) the faith of the one working the miracle—this according to 1 Corinthians 13:2 (“If I have all faith so as to move mountains ...”)—or (b) the faith of the others for whose sake the miracles are worked, and this is why Matthew 13:58 says, “And He did not work many miracles in that place because of their lack of faith.” Therefore, if faith is posited as a gratuitously given grace, then it is superfluous to posit the working of signs as another gratuitously given grace over and beyond this.

But contrary to this: In 1 Corinthians 12:9-10 the Apostle, in addition to listing other gratuitously given graces, says, “To one is given the grace of healing, to another the working of miracles of power.”

I respond: As was explained above (q. 177, a. 1), the Holy Spirit provides sufficiently for the Church in those matters that are useful for salvation, and it is toward salvation that the gratuitously given graces are ordered. Now just as the knowledge that an individual divinely receives needs to be brought to the attention of others through the gift of tongues and through the grace of speech, so the word, once spoken, needs to be confirmed in order for it to become credible. But according to Mark 16:20 (“... and confirming the word with the signs that followed”), this confirmation is effected through the working of miracles—and reasonably so. For it is natural for a man to come to intelligible truth through signs that can be sensed. Hence, just as a man is able, by the guidance of natural reason, to arrive at some knowledge of God through natural effects, so through certain supernatural effects, which are called miracles, a man is led to the supernatural cognition of things that have to be taken on faith. And this is why the working of miracles involves gratuitously given grace.

Reply to objection 1: Just as prophecy extends to all things that can be *known* supernaturally, so the working of miracles of power extends to all things that can be *done* supernaturally. To be sure, the cause of these things is God’s omnipotence, which cannot be shared with any creature. And so it is

impossible for the principle of working miracles to be a quality that remains as a habit in the soul. However, it is nonetheless possible that just as a prophet's mind is moved by divine inspiration to have cognition of something supernaturally, so, too, the mind of an individual who works miracles is moved to do something that is followed by the effect of a miracle which God does by His own power.

This is sometimes done with a preceding prayer, as when Peter brought the deceased Tabitha back to life (Acts 9:40), whereas sometimes it is done not with an explicit previous prayer, but instead with God acting at a man's gesture, as when Peter handed the liars Ananias and Sapphira over to death by upbraiding them (Acts 5:3ff.). Hence, in *Dialogi* 2 Gregory says, "The saints work miracles sometimes by their authority and sometimes by their prayer (*aliquando ex potestate, aliquando ex postulatione*)." Yet it is God who acts in both cases as a principal cause (*principaliter*) that uses as an instrument either a man's interior movement, or his speaking, or, again, some exterior act, or, again, some sort of corporeal contact with a body, even with a dead body. Hence, in Joshua 10:12, after Joshua had said, as if by his own authority, "Sun, do not move beyond Gibeon," he later added (10:14), "There has not been so long a day before that day or since, when the Lord obeyed the voice of a man."

Reply to objection 2: Our Lord is speaking here of the miracles which are going to be worked at the time of the Antichrist and of which the Apostle says in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, "The coming of the Antichrist will be in accord with the workings of Satan, in all power and lying signs and wonders." And as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 20, "The question is often asked whether they are called 'lying signs and wonders' because (a) Satan will deceive the senses of mortals by imaginary visions, so that he will seem to be doing what he is not in fact doing, or because (b) even though they will be real wonders, they will draw people into falsehood."

Now they are called 'real' in the sense that they will themselves be real things, in the way that Pharaoh's magicians produced real frogs and real snakes. But they will not have the true nature of a miracle, because, as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 114, a. 4), they are effected by the power of natural causes. By contrast, the working of miracles that is attributed to a gratuitously given grace is effected by God's power for the advantage of men.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of miracles there are two things that one can pay attention to:

The first is *what is done*, viz., something that exceeds the power of nature. And on this score the miracles are called *miracles of power* (*miracula dicuntur virtutes*).

The other is *that for the sake of which the miracles are worked*, viz., to make manifest something supernatural. And on this score the miracles are commonly called *signs*—though, because of their excellence, they may be called *portents* or *wonders* (*portenta vel prodigia*) in the sense that they manifest something that is far out (*procul*).

Reply to objection 4: The grace of healing is listed separately because through it a benefit is conferred on a *particular* man, viz., bodily health, in addition to the *general* benefit that is exhibited in *every* miracle, viz., that men are led to knowledge of God.

Reply to objection 5: There are two reasons why the working of miracles is attributed to faith. First, because the working of miracles is ordered toward strengthening faith. Second, because the working of miracles proceeds from God's omnipotence, on which faith relies. And yet just as, over and beyond the gift of faith, the grace of speech is necessary for instruction in the faith, so, too, the working of miracles is necessary for the confirming of faith.

Article 2

Can bad individuals work miracles?

It seems that bad individuals cannot work miracles:

Objection 1: As was explained above (a. 1), miracles are worked through prayer. But the prayer of

a sinner is not heard—this according to John 9:31 (“We know that God does not listen to sinners”). And Proverbs 28:9 says, “He who turns his ear away from listening to the Law is such that his prayer will be an abomination.” Therefore, it seems that bad individuals cannot work miracles.

Objection 2: Miracles are attributed to faith—this according to Matthew 17:19 (“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move there!’ and it will move”). But as James 2:20 says, “Faith without works is dead,” and so it does not seem to have its proper operation. Therefore, bad individuals, who are not involved with good works, cannot work miracles.

Objection 3: Miracles are like divine testimonies—this according to Hebrews 2:4 (“... with God bearing them witness by signs and portents and various miracles of power.” Hence in the Church certain individuals are canonized because of the testimony of miracles. But God cannot be a witness to falsehood. Therefore, it seems that bad men cannot work miracles.

Objection 4: The good are more conjoined to God than the bad are. But not every good individual works miracles. Therefore, *a fortiori*, bad individuals do not work miracles.

But contrary to this: In 1 Corinthians 13:2 the Apostle says, “If I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have charity, I am nothing.” But if an individual does not have charity, then he is bad, since, as Augustine puts it in *De Trinitate* 15, “It is this gift of the Holy Spirit by itself that divides the children of the kingdom from the children of perdition.” Therefore, it seems that even bad individuals can work miracles.

I respond: Some miracles are not genuine feats, but are instead imaginary feats by which a man is tricked in such a way that something that does not exist seems to him to exist. On the other hand, some are genuine feats but do not have the true nature of a miracle because they are brought about by the power of certain natural causes. And as was explained above, these two sorts of ‘miracles’ can be worked by demons (a. 1, ad 2).

By contrast, genuine miracles can be worked only by God’s power, and God brings them about for the advantage of men—and this in two modes: (a) in one mode, *in order to confirm the truth of something that has previously been spoken*, and (b) in the second mode, *in order to demonstrate the holiness of someone whom God wants to propose to men as an example of virtue*.

Now in the *first* mode, miracles can be worked through anyone who preaches the faith and invokes the name of Christ, which is sometimes done even by bad individuals. And in accord with this mode, even bad individuals can work miracles. Hence, in commenting on Matthew 7:22 (“Did we not prophesy in your name?”), Jerome says, “Prophesying and working miracles and casting out demons are sometimes not credited as merit to those who do them; instead, it is the invocation of Christ’s name that does these things, so that men might honor God, at the invocation of whom great miracles are worked.”

By contrast, in the *second* mode, miracles are worked only by holy individuals, and the miracles are worked in order to demonstrate their sanctity—either during their life or even after their death, either by themselves or by others. For instance, we read in Acts 19:11-12, “God worked miracles through the hands of Paul ... handkerchiefs were even brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases departed from them.” And, once again, there is nothing to prevent a miracle’s being worked through a sinner at the invocation of some saintly individual. And yet it is not the sinner who is said to work the miracle; instead, it is the one who is such that these things are done in order to demonstrate his holiness.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above when we were talking about prayer (q. 83, a. 16), prayer of supplication relies not on merit, but on God’s mercy, which extends even to bad individuals. And so sometimes even the prayer of sinners is heard by God. Hence, in *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, “The blind man spoke those words as one who was still unanointed”—i.e., not yet completely illuminated—“since God does listen to sinners.”

The passage that says, “The prayer of one who does not listen to the Law is an abomination,” should be understood to be referring to the prayer insofar as it is based on the merit of the sinner. But sometimes a sinner’s prayer proceeds from God’s mercy, either for the sake of the salvation of the one who is praying, in the way that the publican was heard (Luke 18:3-4), or, again, for the salvation of

others and the glory of God.

Reply to objection 2: Faith without works is said to be dead as regards the one who has faith but does not live through it with the life of grace. But nothing prevents a living thing from acting through a dead instrument, in the way that a man acts through a stick. And it is in this way that God acts through the faith of a sinful man as through an instrumental cause (*instrumentaliter*).

Reply to objection 3: Miracles are always true testimonies to what they are introduced for. Hence, genuine miracles are never effected in order to confirm the teaching of bad individuals who assert false doctrine—even though genuine miracles can sometimes be worked in order to praise Christ’s name, which the bad individuals invoke, and by the power of the sacraments, which they administer.

On the other hand, in the case of bad individuals who assert true doctrine, they sometimes work genuine miracles to confirm their teaching, but not to testify to their own holiness. Hence, in 83 *Quaestiones* Augustine says, “Magicians work miracles in one way, good Christians in another way, and bad Christians in yet another way. Magicians do it through private agreements with demons, good Christians through their manifest righteousness, and bad Christians through the appearance of manifest righteousness (*per signa publicae iustitiae*).”

Reply to objection 4: As Augustine says in the same place, “The reason why miracles are not granted to all holy men is that the weak might be deceived by a very pernicious error into thinking that there are greater gifts involved in such feats than in the works of righteousness by which eternal life is procured.”