

Family Catechism Day

23rd March 2017: CCC 275-278—God's Omnipotence

CCC 275 With Job, the just man, we confess: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

CCC 276 Faithful to the witness of Scripture, the Church often addresses her prayer to the "almighty and eternal God" ("omnipotens sempiterne Deus. . ."), believing firmly that "nothing will be impossible with God" (Gen 18:14; Lk 1:37; Mt 19:26).

CCC 277 God shows forth his almighty power by converting us from our sins and restoring us to his friendship by grace. "God, you show your almighty power above all in your mercy and forgiveness. . ." (Roman Missal, 26th Sunday, Opening Prayer).

CCC 278 If we do not believe that God's love is almighty, how can we believe that the Father could create us, the Son redeem us and the Holy Spirit sanctify us?

CCC 271 God's almighty power is in no way arbitrary: "In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are all identical. Nothing therefore can be in God's power which could not be in his just will or his wise intellect."

S.Th. I q.25 a.2 Whether the power of God is infinite?

On the contrary, Hilary says (De Trin. viii), that "*God's power is immeasurable. He is the living mighty one.*" Now everything that is immeasurable is infinite. Therefore the power of God is infinite.

I answer that, As stated above (a.1), active power exists in God according to the measure in which He is actual. Now His existence is infinite, inasmuch as it is not limited by anything that receives it, as is clear from what has been said when we discussed the infinity of the divine essence (q.7 a.1). Wherefore, it is necessary that the active power in God should be infinite. For in every agent it is found that the more perfectly an agent has the form by which it acts the greater its power to act. For instance, the hotter a thing is, the greater the power has it to give heat; and it would have infinite power to give heat, were its own heat infinite...

S.Th. I q.25 a.3 Whether God is omnipotent?

On the contrary, It is said: "*No word shall be impossible with God*" ([Lk 1:37](#)).

I answer that, All confess that God is omnipotent; but it seems difficult to explain in what His omnipotence precisely consists: for there may be doubt as to the precise meaning of the word 'all' when we say that God can do all things. If, however, we consider the matter aright, since power is said in reference to possible things, this phrase, "*God can do all things*," is rightly understood to mean that God can do all things that are possible; and for this reason He is said to be omnipotent. Now according to the Philosopher (Meta. v, 17), a thing is said to be possible in two ways...

It remains therefore, that God is called omnipotent because He can do all things that are possible absolutely; which is the second way of saying a thing is possible. For a thing is said to be possible or

impossible absolutely, according to the relation in which the very terms stand to one another, possible if the predicate is not incompatible with the subject, as that Socrates sits; and absolutely impossible when the predicate is altogether incompatible with the subject, as, for instance, that a man is a donkey.

...For such cannot come under the divine omnipotence, not because of any defect in the power of God, but because it has not the nature of a feasible or possible thing. Therefore, everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms, is numbered amongst those possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent: whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. **Hence it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them.** Nor is this contrary to the word of the angel, saying: "No word shall be impossible with God." For whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a word, because no intellect can possibly conceive such a thing.

Reply to Obj 2: To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence...

Reply to Obj 3: God's omnipotence is particularly shown in sparing and having mercy, because in this is it made manifest that God has supreme power, that He freely forgives sins. For it is not for one who is bound by laws of a superior to forgive sins of his own free will.

S.Th. I q.25 a.4 Whether God can make the past not to have been?

On the contrary, Jerome says (Ep. 22 ad Eustoch.): "*Although God can do all things, He cannot make a thing that is corrupt not to have been corrupted.*" Therefore, for the same reason, He cannot effect that anything else which is past should not have been.

I answer that, As was said above (q.7 a.2), there does not fall under the scope of God's omnipotence anything that implies a contradiction. Now that the past should not have been implies a contradiction. For as it implies a contradiction to say that Socrates is sitting, and is not sitting, so does it to say that he sat, and did not sit. But to say that he did sit is to say that it happened in the past. To say that he did not sit, is to say that it did not happen. Whence, that the past should not have been, does not come under the scope of divine power. This is what Augustine means when he says (Contra Faust. xxix, 5): "*Whosoever says, If God is almighty, let Him make what is done as if it were not done, does not see that this is to say: If God is almighty let Him effect that what is true, by the very fact that it is true, be false*": and the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 2): "*Of this one thing alone is God deprived—namely, to make undone the things that have been done.*"

S.Th. I q.25 a.5 Whether God can do what He does not?

On the contrary, It is said: "*Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of angels?*" ([Mt 26:53](#)). But He neither asked for them, nor did His Father show them to refute the Jews. Therefore God can do what He does not.

I answer that, In this matter certain persons erred in two ways. Some laid it down that God acts from natural necessity in such way that as from the action of nature nothing else can happen beyond what actually takes place—as, for instance, from the seed of man, a man must come, and from that of an olive, an olive; so from the divine operation there could not result other things, nor another order of things, than that which now is. But we showed above (q.19 a.3) that God does not act from natural necessity, but that His will is the cause of all things; nor is that will naturally and from any necessity determined to those

things. Whence in no way at all is the present course of events produced by God from any necessity, so that other things could not happen.

Others, however, said that the divine power is restricted to this present course of events through the order of the divine wisdom and justice without which God does nothing. But since the power of God, which is His essence, is nothing else but His wisdom, it can indeed be fittingly said that there is nothing in the divine power which is not in the order of the divine wisdom; for the divine wisdom includes the whole potency of the divine power. Yet the order placed in creation by divine wisdom, in which order the notion of His justice consists, as said above (q.21 a.2), is not so adequate to the divine wisdom that the divine wisdom should be restricted to this present order of things. Now it is clear that the whole idea of order which a wise man puts into things made by him is taken from their end. So, when the end is proportionate to the things made for that end, the wisdom of the maker is restricted to some definite order. But the divine goodness is an end exceeding beyond all proportion things created. Whence the divine wisdom is not so restricted to any particular order that no other course of events could happen. Wherefore we must simply say that God can do other things than those He has done.

Reply to Obj 1: In ourselves, in whom power and essence are distinct from will and intellect, and again intellect from wisdom, and will from justice, there can be something in the power which is not in the just will nor in the wise intellect. But in God, power and essence, will and intellect, wisdom and justice, are one and the same. Whence, there can be nothing in the divine power which cannot also be in His just will or in His wise intellect. ...For God does things because He wills so to do; yet the power to do them does not come from His will, but from His nature.

S.Th. I q.25 a.6 Whether God can do better than what He does?

On the contrary, It is said ([Eph 3:20](#)): "*God is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand.*"

I answer that, The goodness of anything is twofold; one, which is of the essence of it—thus, for instance, to be rational pertains to the essence of man. As regards this good, God cannot make a thing better than it is itself; although He can make another thing better than it; even as He cannot make the number four greater than it is; because if it were greater it would no longer be four, but another number. For the addition of a substantial difference in definitions is after the manner of the addition of unity of numbers (Meta. viii, 10). Another kind of goodness is that which is over and above the essence; thus, the good of a man is to be virtuous or wise. As regards this kind of goodness, God can make better the things He has made. Absolutely speaking, however, God can make something else better than each thing made by Him.

Reply to Obj 3: The universe, the present creation being supposed, cannot be better, on account of the most beautiful order given to things by God; in which the good of the universe consists. For if any one thing were bettered, the proportion of order would be destroyed; as if one string were stretched more than it ought to be, the melody of the harp would be destroyed. Yet God could make other things, or add something to the present creation; and then there would be another and a better universe.

Reply to Obj 4: The humanity of Christ, from the fact that it is united to the Godhead; and created happiness from the fact that it is the fruition of God; and the Blessed Virgin from the fact that she is the mother of God; have all a certain infinite dignity from the infinite good, which is God. And on this account there cannot be anything better than these; just as there cannot be anything better than God.