

The Miraculous Cure of Agnes Velma Gorman

Ethan T. Trobridge
Holy Cross College

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Author Note: *Learn Everything, Teach Everyone*

Overview

Over the course of the last eight months I have filled my life with the study of my faith, though very much not in the traditional sense. Through working closely with Brother Philip, I have been exposed to new facets of my faith and have been shown what can truly be achieved with faith and the power of it. In the following paper I hope to inform you on one of the more unexplainable yet fascinating examples of this, Mrs. Agnes Velma Gorman, a loving daughter, sister, and wife who was truly touched by God and His saving grace.

Today, I am honored to speak about Brother Columba O'Neill, a humble yet extraordinary figure who truly embodied the concept of "Noblesse Oblige"—the moral obligation of the privileged to act with honor, generosity, and benevolence. Born John O'Neill in 1848, Brother Columba overcame significant personal challenges, including a debilitating foot deformity, to dedicate his life to serving others, and after joining the Congregation of Holy Cross at Notre Dame in 1874, he found his calling not just in the spiritual realm but in the tangible, everyday acts of kindness and healing. Brother Columba's life was a testament to the belief that true nobility comes from service. As a cobbler, he spent nearly four decades mending shoes, but his impact stretched far beyond the physical repairs he made. He became known as the "Miracle Man of Notre Dame," revered for his deep devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, through which many reported miraculous healings. One profound example of his impact is the miraculous cure of Agnes Velma Gorman. Stricken with severe pain and paralysis in her arm following a vaccination, she found no relief from traditional medical treatments. However, after receiving a Sacred Heart Badge from Brother Columba and fervently praying a novena, she awoke on the ninth day completely healed, much to the amazement of her doctors. In Brother Columba, we see a person who did not let his own limitations define him but instead used his gifts to uplift others. His unwavering faith, humility, and compassion are the hallmarks of true nobility. By caring for the sick, providing spiritual solace, and dedicating his life to the betterment of those around him, Brother Columba O'Neill exemplifies the very essence of Noblesse Oblige. His story, along with the testimonies of those he helped, such as Agnes Velma Gorman, reminds us of the enduring power of faith and the profound difference one dedicated individual can make in the lives of many. As we delve deeper into the remarkable life and miracles of Brother Columba, let us turn our attention to the detailed account of Agnes

Velma Gorman's cure, a narrative that not only highlights Brother Columba's saintly virtues but also serves as a powerful testament to the transformative power of faith and prayer.

The first letter from Agnes arrives from 35th Ethel Street, Atlanta Georgia. She begins by stating that she has already been cured by Brother Columba. In her opening few lines, she details how two and a half years ago, Aug 18th, 1919, she was working for the, as she calls it, "Telephone Company". This would have been around the time of the Spanish Influenza, and as an employee of the "Telephone Company", MS Gorman was mandated to receive a vaccine against the Influenza. However, much to the shock of her and her family, Velma experienced tremendous pain following the inoculation. Following MS Gorman's receiving of her inoculation, she was immediately racked with pain all along her arm and experienced, as she put it, "running sores all the time where the needle went into my arm" and following this, embarked on a long and arduous journey of hospital visits and consultants. Upon realizing something was wrong, MS Gorman and her family immediately reached out to their family physician, who has sadly gone unnamed. Their doctor's immediate diagnosis was that, "The nerve in your arm has been punctured", and in the weeks following this diagnosis, complete paralysis had spread throughout Velma's arm and hand, which led to her medical confinement in her bed. In these bedridden months, the doctors tried all forms of treatment to fix Velma's punctured nerve and restore the damaged appendage. Their initial approach was with electroshock therapy, which yielded little results and continued daily for three months before they threw in the towel. Around this point the doctors informed Velma that nothing could be done, and they arranged an operation that we know very little about, though it is safe to assume that it was largely unsuccessful, and potentially even detrimental to Velma's condition as she goes on to write about how five more

specialists came to see her after the procedure. None of them were willing to handle her case. This leads us into the third part of MS Gorman's letter, her miraculous cure itself.

MS Gorman goes on to write about a woman named Mrs. Lundrum, a lady who lived close to one of Velma's cousins. Mrs. Lundrum has a brother who was an active priest at the College of Notre Dame, and she tells Velma that she will write to her brother and request a "special cure badge." It can then be assumed that Mrs. Lundrum followed through with this as MS Gorman goes on to detail how she received a Sacred Heart Badge from Brother Columba, evident by the fact that she refers to it consistently as "your" badge. Gorman then attaches the Sacred Heart Badge to herself, fixing it to the glass cage and bandages that cover her paralyzed arm. She at once began the Novena to the Sacred Heart, praying the Litany of the Sacred Heart nightly before going to bed, as well as various other prayers. She then recounts the evening of the 8th day, where the pain in her arm grew increasingly worse, almost to the point of driving her insane as she put it. This timeline is fairly common in many of Columba's cures, where the cure recipient will experience insufferable pain the night before the cure is performed, which generally takes place sometime on either the eighth or ninth day of the novena. Because Agnes's pain was unbearable, she was unable to sleep at all, so with nothing else to do, she began to pray. MS Gorman prayed from approximately 9 pm that night until 4 am the next morning, eventually passing out from both the pain and exhaustion. When she arose at 7 am that same morning, the pain in her arm had ceased completely, for the first time in two and a half years; moreover, she could move her arm, if only a little bit.

When her bandages and glass shield were removed, much to the amazement of her doctors, there was no running sore, there was no scar, there wasn't even a scab to show that she had suffered unimaginable pain for the last two and a half years. She quotes her doctors: "They

could not understand it. It was a miracle.” She goes on to detail the rapid improvement of her condition, how her strength returned quickly and the ability to use her arm even quicker, until she was completely cured.

This takes us back to the year 1921, when she wrote the letter to Columba. She ends this letter with her profound thanks and appreciation for all that Columba had done for her and requests that he writes back so she might send him an offering of sorts.

MS Gorman begins her letter by showering Brother Columba with immense praise, stating how she received a very, “kind and welcome letter” on the morning of February 23rd, 1921. She goes on to give thanks to Brother for both his involvement in her cure, the incredible levels of fasting and prayer that he must have done, and for his gift of two additional Sacred Heart Badges. She tells him that “Money could never repay you,” and instead offers up prayers for Columba and his good works at Notre Dame.

Following her many thanks to Brother, Agnes goes on to ask for a favor. She was hoping to do some form of a devotional for Brother as thanks to his involvement in her cure, so she requested a picture of him. She writes to Brother about how she wants to frame it, and show off to everyone the “Brother that cured me,” and how she would, “consider it a great honor to have such a saintly one’s picture in my possession.” She ends this piece by requesting information on the cost of the postage, offering to pay for it, and stating how she would pay anything for his photo.

In the next part of her letter, Agnes begins by lamenting about her doctor bills, which is only fair as she spent two and a half years with an incurable malady in the American Healthcare System. Regardless of her misfortune, she requests for Brother to pray for a certain doctor, this being their family physician, and the large amount of cash that they owe him. From the kindness

of his heart, however, the doctor canceled the bills because, "I don't want any money from you, you have enough other bills".

Gorman goes on to write about how her doctor is a non-Catholic, but that he believed in the Catholic Faith, and the only thing that was keeping him away was the idea of Confession. She states how her doctor is a "good man in every way", and requests that Brother will pray that, "God will enlighten him and show him the way to the True Church." And then she pledges that she will write to Brother if he does indeed convert to the "True Church."

Agnes Gorman wraps up her letter by naming Father Charles O'Donnell, CSC, the president of the University of Notre Dame as the priest who sent the Sacred Heart Badge. She then once again expresses her profound thanks, states how she wishes to hear from Columba again, along with wanting a photo of him. She ends her letter quite simply, "With the help of God, I will always remain a good Catholic.

Per usual, Agnes opens her letter by expressing her joy at receiving a new letter from Brother Columba. This letter is different from the others though as she states that she received the picture of Brother Columba, as well as an undisclosed amount of Sacred Heart Badges. She goes on to thank Brother profusely for the letter, the badges, the photo, and her cure. She is also pleased that Brother is talking about her cure and that "the wonderful miracle that was performed through the Sacred Heart of Jesus" is big news at Notre Dame.

Next, Agnes discusses her plans for the Sacred Heart Badges. As soon as she sees her family physician, she plans on giving him one of the two Sacred Heart Badges, whether this be to help convert him or as a show of thanks is unclear. Yet she does want the physician to convert because she says that she believes that The Sacred Heart Badge helped to convert her

grandmother a year before the woman's death. She goes on to state that her grandmother was a Presbyterian until the age of 78 when she converted to Catholicism.

Agnes then speaks of a 59-year-old non-Catholic neighbor who lives near her. She tells Columba that the woman is suffering from quite severe cataracts over one eye, and that she had been blind since age 14. It is unclear if she means to say she has been completely blind or only blind in the diseased eye. She goes on to say that her neighbor is truly desperate for a cure. After hearing about Velma's cure, "she would be very thankful if anything could be done for her (doctors have failed)." If Columba can cure this woman "she would do anything you asked of her" which I believe alludes to her potential conversion. Not much more is known about this woman, and there is no evidence of a cure.

She concludes her letter by once again requesting Brother's prayers for the sake of her neighbor, as well as giving her profound thanks to Brother for his past help. Strangely enough, she signs off in a new way, "I beg to remain, Agnes Velma Gorman ."

On March 5th, 1921, two letters are written by members of the Gorman Family: one from Mrs. Margaret Maloney, Agnes's aunt, as well as a letter from Mrs. Katherine Low, Agnes's cousin. Both of these women were writing to Columba for various reasons, and both know of Agnes's cure, which is why they are writing.

The Maloney letter opens with her telling Columba how Agnes wrote to her a few days prior. In the letter Maloney learns about her cure, and all that Brother Columba did for her during her time of need. Maloney then moves on to address Brother directly, telling him about her own ailment. She moved to Long Beach, California in June, for a change of scenery and for her health.

She recounts how a few months ago, she was experiencing tooth pain which led to her dentist removing all of the lower teeth from her mouth. Following the procedure, she suffered from a strong and sharp pain in her gums, which hadn't healed properly from the surgery. All the dentist had to say was that, "It was due to my general condition". Not much else can be ascertained in her letter as to what that might mean. Maloney says that she "suffer[s] dreadfully and can only sleep with the aid of medicine." She professes her faith to Brother, noting her sincere belief in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She is desperate for relief from the pain.

She concludes her letter by once again proclaiming her faith. Finally, she states that she will mail a substantial offering only AFTER Brother responds to her letter.

On March 5, 1921, Katherine Low, Agnes's cousin, began her letter much like her aunt Mrs. Maloney. She recounts how she has heard of her cousin's cure from her letters, and how she also moved to Long Beach with her for her health.

Katherine recounts that in July she underwent an incredibly serious operation and was hospitalized for two months during and after her operation. She graphically describes that the post-operative has been draining pus for seven weeks and still continues to do so. She notes how it will heal over for a few weeks but, eventually, the pain returns and it leaks puss again. She has been exposing the wound to the sun frequently in hopes that this will make it better.

She requests help from Brother Columba and laments how she has been putting on weight after the surgery; how the pain hasn't completely gone away, and how puss still continues to leak from the incision. Her surgery was for intestinal obstruction. She tells Brother that she has been praying the prayers of the Sacred Heart and how, "I feel sure when I receive the badge and say the prayers that you send, that my side will be healed. I have great faith in The Sacred Heart of Jesus from whom I have received favor".

She concludes her letter by noting that she will also send Brother an offering after she hears from him. There is no evidence that either the cousin or her mother were cured.

In April of 1920, both women heard from Brother Columba. Included in his letter were the Sacred Heart prayers and badges.

Agnes Gorman's aunt notes that her daughter has certainly been improving, though once again, there is no definitive proof that she was completely healed, or if Brother Columba had any impact upon her healing. She also notes that after making the sign of the cross over her face with her Sacred Heart Badge, her gum condition began to improve steadily, noting that the skin had begun to heal over on her gums. She says that she and her daughter will always remember Brother Columba and keep him in their prayers, and they pledge to always tell of their "cures," and both will do their best to spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The letter concludes with Mrs. Maloney saying that she is sending Brother Columba, 5\$, which is worth about \$94.00 today.

Agnes begins her letter by expressing her gratitude to Brother Columba for a most "Beautiful gift", which is, as she puts it, "The family consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." Most likely, this "consecration" is in the form of a picture of the Sacred Heart or a certificate that has been framed and is hanging in her living room. She expresses her immense and continuing gratitude to Brother, and how she has "filled out the family consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." She assures Columba that every member of her family has joined *The League of the Sacred Heart* "devoted to growing in relationship with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and promoting the mission of the Sacred Heart Retreat House." In the second paragraph of her letter, she tells Brother how she has not felt pain in her arm since the cure, and how her health is back to

normal after the nearly three-year ordeal. She has returned to work at the Telephone Company and is feeling perfectly fine. "Words cannot express my gratitude to you."

At the end of her letter, Agnes says that she prays to the honor of "The Sacred Heart" every night before bed, for Brother Columba's intentions, and she vows to do so for as long as she lives. She also expresses her desire for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its message to be spread everywhere in the world. To that end, she would like to finance a shrine of sorts to the Sacred Heart, and asks Brother how she'd go about that as well as to whom she would send the funds.

Most of what is said in this letter is perhaps wishful thinking, or Agnes's desire to return to the Lord what she has received from Him. She expresses her desire about entering religious life. This is completely understandable if we consider the marvelous cure given to her and her desire to give something in return. After much prayer and meditation, that she has decided to enter The Sisters of Mercy in Savannah, Georgia. The Sisters of Mercy have no record that she followed through with her intention. It is also even more important to note that this congregation kept no records on anyone who left before their vows, so it is entirely possible that she did join and later left.

Agnes explains how "many" of her relatives attempted to talk her out of entering the convent, yet she tells Brother Columba, that there is no greater joy in life than serving God, and how she must become a Sister to become closer to Him, "to preserve humanity for His sake".

The letter ends quite plainly as she describes a successful health evaluation, and that she weighs 132 lbs. and is in excellent health, and she asks for Columba's continued prayer and assure him that she will continue to pray for him.

The story of Agnes Velma Gorman serves as a profound testament to the power of faith and the miraculous interventions attributed to Brother Columba. Over my eight months of study, it has become clear to me that her life was dramatically altered by divine intervention. Characterized by severe pain, paralysis, and unhealed sores, she was left bedridden and despondent because traditional medical treatments miserably failed.

The turning point came when Brother Columba sent her the Sacred Heart badge and the novena prayers. On the ninth day of her prayers, after a night of excruciating pain, she awoke to find her arm pain-free and mobile. Her doctors were astounded by the absence of any physical evidence of her prior condition and declared it a miracle.

Additionally, letters from her family members highlight the broader impact of her cure. They, too, sought help from Brother Columba for their ailments, demonstrating the ripple effect of faith and the desire for divine intervention within the community. While some of their outcomes remain uncertain, their correspondence reveals a shared hope and trust in the Sacred Heart's power.

Throughout her correspondence, Gorman's unwavering faith and the miraculous nature of her recovery are consistently emphasized.

In conclusion, the story of Agnes Velma Gorman exemplifies the profound impact of faith in prayers to the Sacred Heart and Brother Columba's role as the Miracle Man of Notre Dame. Her experience, documented through heartfelt letters, provides a narrative of reality for divine intervention in times of dire need. Her gratitude towards Brother Columba and her efforts to spread the message of the Sacred Heart underscore the enduring power of faith.