

MIRACLE FOR CANONISATION

Miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed John Henry Newman approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for his canonisation

Melissa Villalobos lives near Chicago. As a college student at Washington University in St Louis she met her husband-to-be David Villalobos, and it was there that she also first came across the *Newman Center*, which she had assumed was named after a rich benefactor.

Soon after graduating in 2000, she watched a TV show on EWTN called '*Newman At 2000*'. In 2010 she watched the Beatification of Cardinal Newman on EWTN, and remembers being very moved. She was given a prayer card with the face of Newman, and she began to read his works on the Internet and her devotion to him grew, so that she would turn in prayer often to ask him for favours and inspiration.

Melissa is the mother of seven children. The miracle concerns the pregnancy and birth of the fifth child, Gemma.

At the end of April 2013 Melissa discovered she was pregnant, but already by the 1 May, in the sixth week of her pregnancy, she began to experience loss of blood. On 8 May she visited with her obstetrician, who conducted an ultrasound that revealed a subchorionic hematoma from bleeding from a torn placenta, but that the embryo had a normal heartbeat. The subchorionic hematoma was two and a half times the size of the embryo. At that stage Melissa was told that there was nothing to do but bed rest, but if it got worse she should go to the hospital immediately. She was instructed to have weekly ultrasounds to monitor her condition.

The bleeding continued and got worse, so that on 10 May she admitted herself to the emergency ward of the local hospital, and it was emphasised to her not to do anything unless it was absolutely necessary. The doctor told her she would need strict bed rest for many months in order for the ripped placenta to possibly begin to heal. If the baby survived, she would likely be small and born prematurely. She was told a miscarriage was very likely. She returned home, but the blood loss continued without ceasing or slowing down.

On 15 May, as she woke up at 7am, Melissa was aware that she was bleeding significantly. Her husband with a very heavy heart was already on a flight from Chicago to Atlanta, for a mandatory work trip, and her four children (aged six, five, three and one) needed breakfast.

Melissa got up and managed to seat her children for breakfast before realising that she was bleeding even more profusely, and had to visit the bathroom urgently so as not to upset the children. She told them to stay seated in the kitchen, and went back upstairs to her bedroom, closing the door.

She made it into the bathroom, again closing the door, before she collapsed on the floor of the bathroom. It was 10 in the morning. Even though she was lying quite still on the floor, the blood continued to flow heavily. She felt she could not even shout for help as even that exertion of abdominal force would make her bleed even more with disastrous consequences. She did not have her phone with her to call for help. She was afraid, first for the life of the baby she was carrying, and then for her own life with such a loss of blood. She was also worried about her other children whom she had left alone downstairs: she was very concerned that her children would find her on the floor in a pool of blood, and not know how to contact their father on his flight, and would be left alone and in a traumatic state.

At that stage she invoked Blessed John Henry, saying "Please Cardinal Newman make the bleeding stop!" As soon as she had finished her sentence the bleeding stopped. She immediately thanked Cardinal Newman, convinced that she had been healed by his intercession. She was then able to hurry downstairs and check on her children with no further bleeding.

On a visit to the doctor later that very same day, 15 May, he confirmed with an ultrasound that Melissa had been cured of her condition, and her placenta was no longer torn. The bleeding never returned. She immediately resumed all of her normal activities as a mother, including carrying her young children. Gemma was born normally as were two further children since then.

After an initial investigation carried out by the archdiocese of Chicago, the account of the miracle was submitted to the Holy See in 2018. The theologians studying the case voted unanimously that the healing of Melissa Villalobos was a miracle performed by God through the intercession of Blessed John Henry Newman. The miracle was finally approved by Pope Francis on 13 February 2019 paving the way for the canonisation of Cardinal Newman.