

## Basilica of St. Mary Tour and Walking Reflection



As you enter this significant place of prayer for Northern Virginia and our Diocese, be mindful of the rich history of this building, standing tall in the middle of an historic city of American patriots, freedom-lovers, and national pioneers. The ways of Jesus have been taught, proclaimed, and celebrated in this building since 1826. But the faith of the people of Northern Virginia existed long before. In fact, the first church for the people of St. Mary's parish was built in 1795 down Royal Street at the site of St. Mary's Cemetery. The cemetery is still situated there to this day. But even before that, local Catholics would gather for prayer at a log cabin at North Royal and Princess Streets.

There is an opportunity for receiving a **plenary indulgence** for visiting the Basilica and participating in a sacred rite, such as Mass or Adoration (or at least praying the Lord's Prayer and a profession of faith), provided the other conditions are met: 1) Go to confession, 2) Receive Holy

Communion, and 3) Pray for the intentions of the Holy Father.

### Access for Persons with Disabilities

For those visitors to the Basilica who require a ramp for accessibility, a ramp can be found on the south side of the Basilica leading to the transept entrance.

The Basilica church – both inside and out – contains much history, sacred art and devotional imagery. The Basilica contains elements that boldly express the Catholic faith which the people of the parish profess, as well as particular elements of a Marian theme. Two striking symbols of a Basilica are present in the sanctuary.

There is much in St. Mary's Basilica to ponder and pray with; this tour will provide a few highlights. You are encouraged to spend more time in this place of prayer than this tour suggests.



The **Belfry Tower** was originally constructed between 1857 – 1877, as a 133-foot tall structure. In 1895, it was designed into what it is today as a 140-foot bell tower. A 70-foot tower (on the north side of the Basilica – to the left as you face the entrance) which houses the spiral staircase leading to the choir loft was installed in 1896.



The **front doors** of the Basilica are made of mahogany wood from Honduras – a gift to the parish from a captain of a merchant ship in 1895. These doors highlight the importance of Alexandria as a centuries old port city.

### Understanding the Layout

To get your bearings for this tour – the church is in a mostly traditional cruciform structure with a central nave and two cross transepts (each transept has a loft for extra seating). The front main entrance is the west side of the Basilica. The sanctuary is on the east end of the church with the transept on your right as you face the altar being the south side and the left the north side of the church.



This parish had its beginnings in a time when it was difficult to publicly profess one's Catholic faith. Facing Royal Street, windows are present which seem to say to the street and world beyond that *We are Catholic!* **Papal keys** are displayed in an oculus window on the south side of the church in the stairwell going up to the choir loft. Images of the brave **North American Jesuit martyrs** also face Royal Street to the public below. Stained glass windows of St. John de Brebeuf and St. Isaac

Jogues (left side of organ), and St. Gabriel Lalemant and St. Rene Goupil (right side of organ) adorn the choir loft. Added in 1948 by Monsignor Edward Stephens, the windows of the North American martyrs convey that the people of St. Mary's are Catholic *and American* – taking pride in their Catholic heritage while appreciating the sacrifice made



by that same Catholic heritage in bringing Catholicism to America. A memorial to the Jesuit tradition (the North American Martyrs were Jesuits) was also appropriate given the founding of St. Mary's by Fr. Francis Neale of the Jesuit Order.

A **statue of St. Thomas More**, our Diocesan patron, is seen to the left as you walk into the Basilica. Behind the statue of St. Thomas More is a stained glass window of **Jesus and Nicodemus**. In his teaching, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about Baptism. This part of the Basilica used to be the baptistry. Why not stop and pray for our Diocese at the statue of St. Thomas?



A **statue of St. Therese of Lisieux** stands in reverent prayer in the narthex of the church (to your right as you walk into the Basilica). Why not stop here and bring your needs to Our Lord through this dear saint who said "I wish to spend my heaven in doing good upon the earth"? And elsewhere, "I will let fall a shower of roses." Therese is seen holding roses in her hands as she embraces a crucifix.

A German company built the **organ** (made of mahogany wood and metal) to suit the acoustics of the Basilica. It was completed in 1986, largely with a donation from the estate of Miss Eleanor Nugent, who was the organist and choir director for more than 50 years. The organ is known as "The Nugent Organ."



### General Introduction to the Windows

Among the most stunning elements of the Basilica, are the beautiful stained glass windows enhancing the space. Many of the windows were completed in 1895, for the marking of the parish centenary. The oldest windows are those closest to the sanctuary. Some windows were completed in 1929 following renovations after a fire, which damaged much of the ceiling.

## Windows on the North Side of Nave

Stained glass windows displaying **St. Bridget and St. Patrick** are located on the north side of nave. With many immigrants from Ireland to the Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., area, these windows mark the local faith of Irish Catholics.



In the rear of the nave on the left as your facing the altar (north side), is a stained glass window of **Jesus and St. Margaret Mary Alacoque**. In personal revelations, Jesus visited St. Margaret Mary and called on the Christian faithful to be devoted to His Most Sacred Heart.

A **statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Pleading** is found to the right of the altar – in the south side transept. Made of Italian marble and carved in 1893 it is over 125 years old. It was originally in a church in the Diocese of Albany until 2010, when it was donated by a parishioner to the Basilica. Jesus pleads to the Father on our behalf. Why not



stop and say a prayer at the stained glass window of the Sacred Heart or at this statue?

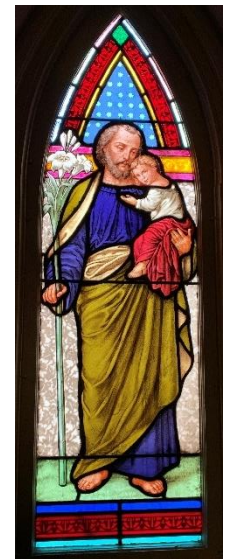
## Windows on the South Side of Nave

**The Holy Family** is pictured on the south side of nave. This image is filled with meaning. Jesus, who is shown learning carpentry from his earthly father, St. Joseph, is holding a ruler, foreshadowing what he would do later in life – carrying the Cross to his crucifixion and death for our salvation. White lilies and red roses are present at Mary's side. What do you think those represent? Why not stop at this image and pray for your family?



**The Lord Jesus with the Little Children** is depicted in stained glass windows on the south side of the nave. Perhaps a prayer underneath this stained glass window would provide a brief respite for a weary parent of small children. We can learn from Jesus who said, "Let the children come to me..." (Matthew 19:14). This window is dedicated to Francis Murphy, MD, who was known for being generous in his treatment of others, seeing patients even if they lacked the ability to pay.

A stained glass window of **St. Joseph and the Child Jesus**, is found in the inside south stairwell leading up to the choir loft. In this Year of St. Joseph, why not visit this window and meditate on the wonders and blessedness of St. Joseph, Protector of the Church?



**The Stations of the Cross** date back to church renovations of 1857 and are believed to be painted by Edward Schuler. Why not pray the Stations or at least pause, reflect and pray at a few of them?

## Marian Imagery



Images and symbols of Mary, the Blessed Virgin, abound in the church. Titles of Mary, as invoked in the Litany of Loretto (a traditional prayer to the Blessed Mother) are represented in the Basilica – Mary as the Mystical Rose, and the Tower of Ivory. There are two Mystical Rose oculus windows. Walking in, on your left, an oculus window of the **Mystical Rose** can be seen. As you walk further into the church, another oculus window of the **Mystical Rose** (pictured

here) can be seen on the west wall of the south transept (to the right of the altar). Why not walk a kind of Marian path – meditating on the blessedness of the Mother of God as you visit the images attesting to her greatness?



An oculus window of the **Tower of Ivory** is displayed on the south transept (to the right), immediately as you walk in from Royal Street.

An “**AM**” **monogram** (representing “Ave Maria”) is displayed in an oculus window in the south transept loft. The initials are intertwined around a white cross – indicating the white martyrdom Mary experienced as she accompanied her Son in his

Passion.



Under her title of **Our Lady of Perpetual Help**, Mary is depicted in a stained glass window on the north side of the church, in the central nave.

As you walk through the main part of the Basilica (the nave), look up and appreciate the art adorning the ceiling. **The Immaculate Conception** is depicted.





Often present in the sanctuary of a Catholic Church, a statue of Mary, in this case, **Our Lady of Sorrows**, is seen to the right as you face the altar (the south side). But this statue is part of a more elaborate Marian theme in the sanctuary space. On the ceiling above, there are painted stars amid a sky blue backdrop – suggesting a *window into heaven* – calling to mind Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth.

An oculus window of the **Immaculate Heart of Mary** overlooks the altar. In this traditional depiction, a sword pierces her heart – as it was said of Mary by the prophet Simeon, “and you yourself a sword will pierce...” (Luke 2:35). It is as if the gaze of Mary continually

looks down upon the altar where her Son is re-presented on the cross in sacrificial love.



Mary is sometimes called the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. An oculus window of **the Holy Spirit** flanks the edge of this space as it reminds us of the ever present Spirit of God, whose invocation brings about the change of the bread and wine at the altar into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus in the Eucharist.

On the south side of the central nave (left if facing the altar), a stained glass window depicting **St. John the Beloved and St. Mary Magdalene** is displayed. Why not pause at this image of the Apostle to whom Jesus entrusted the care of his Blessed Mother (St. John) and pray for a greater love and admiration for Our Lady?



## The Sanctuary



There is much art and devotional imagery found in and above the sanctuary which moves the heart to prayer. The **Central Crucifix**, located above the tabernacle, is life size and ornately decorated. It was installed in the 1940s.

The **Altar of Sacrifice** (the main altar) is made of highly polished Italian marble. The altar was consecrated in 1856 by the Most Reverend Francis Patrick Kendrick, sixth



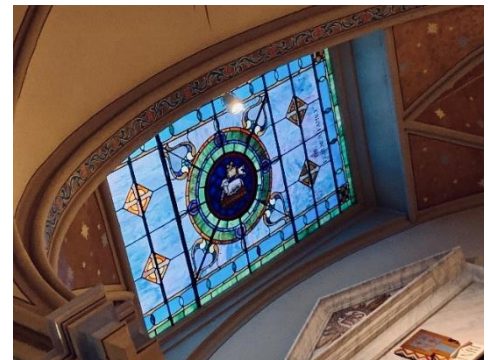
Archbishop of Baltimore. The altar contains relics of an unknown saint(s) – unfortunately the documentation concerning the relics are unavailable.



Constructed in 1857, the **surround for the tabernacle** was designed to match the main altar. Made in Philadelphia of highly polished marble, the columns and arched top convey an appropriate kingly and royal look for the Real Presence contained (within its space) in the tabernacle.

Can you spot the **carving of the Sacred Heart of Jesus** beneath the tabernacle?

Above the sanctuary can be found a decorative **Skylight of the Lamb of God Triumphant**. Installed in 1881 as a gift from the Feulner family, the skylight casts the eastern sun onto the altar below. The ornate skylight displays an image of the Lamb of God atop the seven seals of the Book of Revelation. The Lamb is embracing the *Buttony Cross*. This traditional cross indicates the connection of the Church in Northern Virginia with the City and Archdiocese of Baltimore. The Buttony Cross comes from the family crest of the Calvert family who founded the City of Baltimore. Maryland was the first colony where Catholicism



could be practiced and Baltimore became the first Archdiocese of the United States. Buttony Crosses can be found elsewhere in the Basilica.

A 2011 earthquake that shook Northern Virginia sent a brick from the edifice of the church through the skylight below. The falling brick also damaged the right arm of the Corpus of Our Lord on the Cross before crashing into the marble tile below.



Gazing upon the ceiling surrounding the skylight, one can discern what appears to be a “window into heaven”, also originally installed in 1881. Painted stars on a gold background adorn the area, while elements of sky blue enhance the crossing arches. This image calls to mind Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth, also titled “Star of the Sea”. Just as the north star would guide ships to safe harbor, so too does Mary guide the faithful to her Son (a fitting image in the Port City of Alexandria).

Imagery which highlights the sacred nature of the space continues to abound. Directly above the main altar, is a **painting of the Holy Spirit** (represented as a dove) on the ceiling. This is a relevant placement for this depiction of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, as we recall that through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of bread and wine are changed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord. Furthermore, an **oculus window of the Holy Spirit** is situated on the north wall (to the left) above the altar.



Opposite the oculus window of the Holy Spirit, is an image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who is known as the Spouse of the Spirit. The Immaculate Heart of Mary is displayed in an oculus window to the right of the altar (the south side). In this traditional depiction, a sword pierces her heart, as if the gaze of Mary continually looks down upon the altar where her Son’s sacrifice is re-presented in sacrificial love.



On either side of the altar is a **statue of St. Joseph** (to the left) and **Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows** (to the right). It is fitting that the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows is present underneath the window of the Immaculate Heart of Mary which represents the sorrow of the Blessed Mother.



Among the oculus windows in the nave, the two nearest the sanctuary speak of the love of Christ, High Priest, offered on the altar. An image of the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** is present on the north side of nave, while an image of a **pelican feeding its young** on the south side. The mother pelican, who, according to legend, pierces her own breast to feed her young, is a symbol for Christ, who nourishes his faithful with his life-giving blood.



## Symbols of a Basilica

Last, but certainly not least, two symbols of a basilica are seen in the sanctuary: the **ombrellino** (to the right of the altar) and the **tintinnabulum** (to the left). The ombrellino and tintinnabulum indicate the connection between the basilica and the Holy Father.



### Ombrellino

The presence of the ombrellino goes back to a tradition in the Middle Ages in which an umbrella was used as a sign of honor and distinction for the Holy Father in a procession. The ombrellino or “little umbrella” is left slightly open as a sign of it always being ready for the Holy Father. This “little umbrella” is adorned with embroidered images which speak of the significance of the Diocese of Arlington and the Basilica. The Coat of Arms of Pope Pius VI and crest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (the pope and archdiocese of the Basilica at the time of the founding

of St. Mary’s parish) are found on the little umbrella as well as the Coat of Arms of Bishop Burbidge and Pope Francis. Red and gold colors are traditional papal colors.

### Tintinnabulum

A centuries-old tradition, the tintinnabulum is a bell that would be rung to announce to the community that the Pope is coming near in procession. The imagery on this tintinnabulum conveys the meaning and significance of the Basilica and its history. The decorative “M” represents Mary; the stars are taken from the Diocesan seal and the boat represents the port city of Alexandria. The IHS symbol (Latin for Jesus, Savior of Mankind: *Iesus Hominum Salvator*) represents the Jesuit Order who founded St. Mary’s. Atop the tintinnabulum are **papal cross keys** which signify the Basilica’s connection to the Holy Father. Can you spot papal keys elsewhere in the Basilica?



A **photograph of Pope Francis** can be found on the western wall of the south transept. Pope Francis has asked for prayers, why not stop at this picture and pray for him?

## IHS (Jesuit) Symbols

Images can be found in the church which signify the Jesuit order, the Society of Jesus. Priests of the Society of Jesus founded significant Catholic institutions in the greater Washington area in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Archbishop John Carroll, a Jesuit, founded Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Georgetown (before he was a bishop) in 1787, shortly after that he founded Georgetown University (College). Fr. Francis Neale, S.J., who founded St. Mary's Parish also served as president of Georgetown College in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The **IHS monogram**, a symbol for Jesus and representation of the Jesuit Order, can be found in oculus windows in the Basilica. Two can be found in the north transept loft. And one is displayed on a chalice above the stained glass window of the Holy Family on the south side of the central nave.



Where else can you find *IHS* in the Basilica?



Located in the north transept, there is a depiction of the authentic Divine Mercy image. The **Vilnius Image of Divine Mercy** is the authentic portrait of Our Lord, the Divine Mercy, as approved by St. Faustina Kowalska, who experienced the Divine Mercy revelations.

## Portraits on Nave Ceiling

Three striking portraits span the ceiling of the nave. They were installed in 1929 during renovations following a fire that damaged the ceiling. A painting of the **Death of St. Joseph** is visible as you walk into the Basilica. Traditions tells us that St. Joseph died in the arms of Jesus and Mary and is therefore considered the patron of a happy death. Let us commend to St. Joseph our own deaths, but also perhaps pray for your loved ones who have died as you ponder this image. The painting is believed to be painted by Alexandria artist, F.S. Shuman.





There is a painting of **The Immaculate Conception** in the center of the nave. Patroness of the Basilica, our dear mother Mary is quick to come to our aid; invoke her intercession in your every necessity! This image is best viewed from the east (with the altar behind you), to signify the Immaculate Lady's intimate connection with our Triune Lord and the salvific activity occurring in the sanctuary. This rendering by F.S. Shuman, is a copy of Bartolome Estaban Murillo's original.

Calling to mind the salvific activity of the Triune God which takes place on the altar below, a painting of **The Most Holy Trinity** is fittingly found on the ceiling nearest the sanctuary. The Persons of the Trinity are best viewed from the east, as if they are presiding over the altar. This painting is also believed to be executed by F.S. Shuman.



On the south side outside the Basilica near the ramp to the transept entrance, is a **Statue of the Holy Family**. Why not pause at this statue as you leave the Basilica and say a prayer for your family?

### ***Prayer after the Basilica visit***

*Good and Gracious God, we give you thanks for this Basilica visit today. We give you thanks for the beauty of this Church and for your Real Presence among us! May our faith be renewed and strengthened this day. And may the faith and courage of Northern Virginia Catholics who have gone before us inspire our own Christian commitment. In honor of your Blessed Mother, after whom this Basilica is named, we pray Hail Mary...*

Conclude with the Sign of the Cross.