

# St. Mary Star of the Sea Walking Tour

*Welcome to St. Mary Star of the Sea R. C. Church, a beautiful church that is rich in art, history and architecture; home to a vibrant, worshipping community.*

*Art, History & Architecture Guide provided by St. Mary Star of the Sea Historic Ministry*

## Church History & Architecture

The cornerstone for the church was laid on July 17, 1853, and the doors opened on April 29, 1855. Renowned architect, Patrick C. Keely (1816-1896) from Tipperary, Ireland, designed the structure. Keely immigrated to New York in 1842, and during his career designed over 600 churches and 16 cathedrals. The carpenter, Thomas Houghton of 57 Nelson Street (at Hicks Street), was Keely's son in law. The church, when constructed in the mid-nineteenth century, sat on a lot with a clear view of New York harbor, hence the name "Star of the Sea".

The church is constructed according to a classic floor plan; as you enter through the center doors, you face the central nave, which ends at the altar, where Mass is celebrated. The nave is the area where parishioners sit. St. Mary's is a neo-Gothic design, featuring one center aisle and two side aisles.

## Stained Glass Windows

A series of stained glass windows line both sidewalls, and appear above the altar in the sanctuary and on the rear wall of the church. St. Mary Star of the Sea purchased the windows from Franz Mayer & Co. of Munich, Germany. The installation began in October, 1897. In addition to providing the stained glass for St. Mary's, Franz Mayer made stained glass windows for nine of Ireland's cathedral churches.

The scenes on the windows represent a chronology of events in the life of the Virgin and the life of Christ. Begin on the left side wall at the front of the church. The windows depict the following: the Apparition & Revelation of Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Allacoque, the Immaculate Conception, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, Jesus' Presentation in the Temple, and the Holy Family at Nazareth.

Walk up the center aisle to the sanctuary. Above the altar, the central

window portrays Mary, Star of the Sea, standing on a rock among the waves, holding the infant Christ. The flanking windows illustrate scenes from the life of the Virgin, including, left to right: Mary with her mother, St. Anne, Mary's presentation in the temple, the Annunciation, and Mary's Espousal to Joseph.

The stained glass windows on the right side wall of the church, feature, from front to back: the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Jesus disputing with the doctors in the Temple, Christ blessing the children, the Good Shepherd, the Marriage Feast at Cana, the Resurrection, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and the Assumption of the Virgin. The central window of the gallery (choir loft) features the Coronation of the Virgin. To the left, is a window depicting the tradition of the Holy House of Loretto.

## Stations of the Cross



Interspersed among the windows along the sidewalls are mosaic depictions of the Stations of the Cross, commissioned by the same company that created the altar. The Stations begin on the left sidewall at the front of the church. Each of the 14 Stations depicts a scene from the Passion of Christ. As you walk through the Stations, there are a number of interesting highlights. For example, the artist, Colombani included his dog in Station Three. His wife and daughter appear in Station Eight. In other Stations, people are dressed in the style of a different time period.



## The Altar Rail

Walk back up the center aisle to the altar rail, where communicants received the Eucharist. The center portion of the rail was removed when modifications were made to the church to reflect the changes adopted by the Second Vatican Council. The altar rail, installed in 1899, and called the “most magnificent and costliest in America” by the Brooklyn Eagle (February 26, 1899), was designed by Colombani, “the famous ecclesiastical artist.” The rail was executed in Carrara, Italy, home of the famous marble quarries that provided raw materials to Michelangelo and other artists of the Renaissance.



The rail is three ft. high and 60 ft. long. Different parts of the rail feature marble from a variety of well-known quarries in northern Italy, including the base of the rail from the Breccia quarry, near Carrara; red marble on the base of each column from a quarry in Verona; the caps of the columns are gray marble from Mount Altissimo in northwest Tuscany; and yellow marble from Siena runs along the top of the rail. The two steps leading to the rail are marble from the quarry in Venice that supplied marble for St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice and the Palace of the Doges.

There were originally eight panels between the rail columns, before the center of the rail was removed. Each of

the remaining panels is filled with Venetian mosaic, with the tiles of a burnished gold, and in the Venetian tradition, without any grout between the tiles.

The first panel (from left to right) represents the Immaculate Conception. The scene reflects the passage in Revelations, Chapter XII, “clothed with the sun and moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

The second panel represents St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, holding the hand of the Virgin as a young child.

The third panel illustrates the sacrament of Penance, showing a penitent in confession, hands bound by chains. The Sacred Heart of Jesus drips blood onto the chains, dissolving them, in reference to Jesus’ dissolving sin through confession.

The fourth panel of the altar rail depicts St. Margaret Mary holding an image of the Sacred Heart, who appeared to her in the seventeenth century.

The fifth panel represents the Seal of Divine Love.

Another panel, below the Holy Oils, represents the death of St. Joseph, with Mary and Jesus at his side.

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## The Altar

The altar, consecrated on December 19, 1895, is an extraordinary sculpture. At the time it was purchased, it cost \$20,000. The altar is 20 feet high and has four towers, each featuring an angel. A crown tops the altar.

The figures of the evangelists are carved into niches on the altar, each shown with his attributes: St. Matthew with the Angel, St. Mark with the Lion, St. John with the Eagle and St. Luke with the Ox.

On the front side of the altar are depictions of scenes that prefigure the consecration that occurs at every Mass - the Last Supper and the Parable of the Loaves and Fishes.

The paintings on either side of the altar feature the Offering of Melchisedech, on the left and the Sacrifice of Isaac, on the right.

The side altar chapels contain statues that depict Our Lady St. Mary Star of the Sea on the left of the altar and Jesus with St. Margaret Mary Allacoque on the right of the altar.



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