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Basilica.

The first time I ever stood in a Basilica was on Lough Derg Island on the river Shannon in Ireland. This little island on which the Basilica is built is locally known as “St. Patrick’s Purgatory.”

I spent three days there with several hundred people on retreat. You had to remove your shoes and socks thereby allowing the insects to feast on your feet. Black tea and toast accompanied an all-night vigil.

Here in the United States I was surprised to discover that there are 78 Basilicas. I should make the distinction between Major and Minor Basilica.

There are only 4 Major Basilicas and they are all in Rome, John Lateran, St. Peter’s, St. Paul’s and Mary Major. To the best of my knowledge all the other Basilicas are Minor.

Given that our Patroness here in Tacoma is the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, perhaps the preferred Basilica for us to visit would be the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Maybe you can climb its 30 story tower.

Should I claim a little Irish connection? The Architectural firm was **Maginnis and Walsh** from Boston.

In 1913 Bishop Thomas **Sheehan** Rector of the Catholic University of America got the Pope’s nod to begin construction and even got a donation of \$400 from his Holiness.

Maginnis called the style of architecture Byzantine-Romanesque and very American.

A unique feature of most Basilicas is the **apse**, the semi-circular front end of the church. It was the place where the altar was placed and around which the clergy sat, usually the east end of the building.

The design causes your eye to come to a focus around the table of representation of the Last Supper. “This is my body, this is my blood.”

One item on your bucket list might be to visit all 78 Basilicas of the United States.

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