

07-The Duomo, interior (the crypt, left hand side, early Christian remains)

The visit to the Duomo continues along the right hand side of the presbytery, past the door at the back of the choir, where a staircase leads down to the area under the main altar.

Here is the room containing the Treasure of the Duomo, where some of the most valuable furnishings of the Church are on show, together with the crypt of Saint Carlo and the martyrs' crypt. The crypt of St. Carlo is a small but very preciously decorated octagonal chapel, built in 1606 by Francesco Maria Richini, guarding the remains of Saint Carlo Borromeo in a coffin made of silver and rock crystal.

The crypt opposite was designed by Pellegrino Tibaldi, and is a splendid circular chapel, richly decorated with plaster and coloured marble, and which contains the remains of the martyrs of Milan under the centre altar.

Once back in the main cathedral, we cross over to the left hand transept, divided into three naves like that opposite. At the back to the right is a small door, now closed to the public, that once led to the "Princes' Room", reserved only for the highest dignitaries. Today it leads to the elevator up to the roof terraces, but for access, you must leave the cathedral and reach it from outside.

In the centre nave of the transept is the chapel of the Virgin of the tree (Madonna dell'Albero), by Francesco Maria Richini. In front is a bronze Gothic Trivulzian candelabra decorated with religious scenes and figures, but also dragons, monkeys and wild animals. 5 metres high, it dates back to the 13th century and takes its name from the archdeacon Trivulzio who donated it in 1562.

Lastly, the final nave of the transept contains the altar of Saint Catherine of Siena, the only Gothic altar in the Duomo.

From here we continue towards the entrance doors along the left hand nave of the Church. Like the right hand side, this contains a row of three altars designed by Pellegrini. In order, these are dedicated to Saint Ambrose, Saint Joseph, and to the crucifix of Saint Carlo. The myriad of lighted candles on the last altar is a sign of the public's devotion towards the miraculous wooden crucifix which is displayed here: it is the same cross borne by Saint Carlo to stop the plague in 1576.

This brings us rapidly back almost to the beginning of the nave, where on the walls, are two beautiful red marble plaques showing figures of the apostles in relief. These are Romanesque works dating back to the end of the twelfth century, and were originally from the church of Santa Maria Maggiore.

Opposite, set on four columns is another creation by Pellegrini: the baptistery.

The precious centre baptismal font carved in porphyry, dates back to Roman times.

Once again on the wall, near the exit, there is a plaque showing the twelfth sign of the zodiac: Capricorn. All the other signs are marked on the floor along a horizontal golden line, and form part of the sun dial designed by the astronomers of Brera in 1786. High up in the nave opposite, you can see a small hole through which the light shines at midday on the sign of the zodiac of that particular month. During the winter solstice, more or less during the Christian Christmas period, the light strikes the plaque of the Capricorn, lighting it up.

To conclude, next to the central portal is the entrance to one of the most striking and moving parts of the Duomo: the Early Christian remains of the Church of Saint Tecla and the Baptistery of San Giovanni alle Fonti (Saint John of the baptismal fonts) They were discovered in 1960, during the construction work for the subway. Practically in the centre, the canals that used to channel the water and the traces of the ancient octagonal baptismal font can be clearly seen: this was the exact place where, on Easter Sunday night of the year 387, Saint Ambrose baptised Saint Augustin.