



FONDAZIONE BANCA DEL MONTE DI LOMBARDIA

Pavia e la sua provincia



5-Inside the Basilica of San Michele

The grand inside of the Basilica of San Michele, shaped as a Latin cross, is of three naves, with crossed vaults held up by pilasters. Above the lateral naves, the matron lodgings are displayed, delimited by large arches, while the crossing of the main nave with the transept lift the octagonal lantern. In the course of the 1400s, because of the precarious conditions, remodelling work was necessary that transformed the inside as we admire it today.

The beautiful capitals that surmount the pilasters represent mostly biblical stories, illustrated for the catechism of the faithful. In an era in which few knew how to read, they constituted an excellent didactic means. The capital that ornates the second pilaster is exemplary, to the right of the main nave. On one side is represented the temptation of Adam in Eden: Eve offers him the apple and between them rises the tree of good and evil around which the serpent twists. On the other side, Cain and Abel offer their gifts to God, but the divine hand comes down to accept only Abel's goat.

On the last pilaster on the left of the same nave is the most famous episode: the death of justice. Here the soul of an old sickly man, in the appearance of a young boy, holds on to the habit of the archangel Michael. In the meantime, a little devil, who is already holding onto one of the legs, is stabbed by the angel with a long spear.

In the pavement of the central nave are four black marble discs. The latin dedication that accompanies them says, in antique tradition, here was the throne of the king, when, with a solemn ritual, he received the iron crown. The celebrated crown of the Queen Teodolinda remained in fact, in Pavia until the 13th century and only after was brought to Monza.

In front and above, on the triumphal arc above the presbytery, is the group of 1400 with the cross, the Virgin Mary and Saint John: they are lineage statues like all of the other in the basilica. Again down on the presbytery, the marble alter of 1383 is attributed to Giovannino de Grassi, artist who was occupied in the same years in the factory of the Duomo of Milan.

Unfortunately, it was this alter that, moved forward in the 16th century, damaged a few figures of the splendid mosaic pavement underneath. It dates back to about 1000 AD and represents the Anno, king on the throne, with next to him the allegories of the months engaged in the respective activities. At his feet, the Labyrinth takes place with at the center the Minotaur killed by Teseo.

Behind the alter is the golden, 6th century lineage group of the Majesty, that rises with complicated architecture. Another Majesty of the 4th century, is instead frescoed in the basin apse. Work of art by Agostino and Giovanni da Vaprio, it represents the Virgin crowned by Christ amongst a multitude of musical angels.

The oratorical crypt is evocative, extending underneath the presbytery and the apse. It is divided into three small naves by two lines of surmounted columns, each with a different capital. The extraordinary variety includes some dating back to late antique Rome. They represent the whole imaginary medieval sample and many are of refined making.

Again on the ground floor the visit proceeds along the transepts. In the left one, the cross said to be of Teodote is found, a masterpiece of the 10th century silver plated and worked in relief. It is characterized by the missing signs of Passion, a detail which highlights the divine nature of Christ.

For the same reason, according to Byzantine tradition, the death of the Madonna is interpreted as sleep. And that is how we see her, in fact, in the Sleeping Virgin: the 12th century fresco placed in the hollow of the transept to the right.

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