

On entering the Duomo, the visitor is slightly overpowered by the five enormous naves and the incredible height of the vaulted ceiling supported by 52 gigantic pillars crowned with statues. This is one of the effects created by Gothic architecture, like the mysterious atmosphere filtered by the light from the 39 magnificent stained glass windows with their wonderful colours and figures. This is not simply due to the light and atmosphere: ancient history, strange legend, large and small treasures surround you... Let us go and discover a few of them, beginning with the first right hand span. Right in front of you is the granite tomb of the archbishop Ariberto da Intimiano: it was he in about the year 1000, who built the famous chariot on which he led the Milanese rebellion against the German emperor Corrado Secondo. Above this is a copy of the precious crucifix in gilded copper that he gave to the monastery of San Dionigi. Today the original can be seen in the Duomo museum. On the left near the confessional, a small stone plaque recalls that the construction of the Duomo began in 1386 : *Principio dil Domo di Milano fu nel anno 1386.*

Further on, the arc set on two columns of red marble, carved in the 14th century by the Campionesi master craftsmen, contains the remains of Ottone and Giovanni Visconti: brave warriors who became Lords of Milan as well as archbishops! Their names are also included in the long list of the headstones a little further on, containing all the archbishops of Milan right to the very last....This is followed by a late gothic sarcophagus . Here lies Marco Carelli, the merchant who donated the funds for the construction of the first spire. For this reason, he was given the privilege of being the only non-ordained person to be buried in the Duomo. Here we find three altars dedicated in order to Saint Agatha, the Sacred Heart, and the Virgin. These were designed in the latter half of the 16th century by the architect Pellegrino Tibaldi, called il Pellegrini, who was assigned the direction of the Duomo construction by the archbishop, Carlo Borromeo.

Now we are in the transept. At the time, it was the future Saint Carlo who closed the two doors to block off the noisy comings and goings of the people of Milan who would take a short-cut through the cathedral, sometimes even with a barrow or a pair of capons. This is the right hand side of the transept, divided into three naves. To the right is the tomb of Gian Giacomo Medici, sculpted by Leone Leoni; in the centre is the chapel of Saint Giovanni Bono, in place of one of the two doors closed by Borromeo. And lastly to the left is the imposing statue of the flayed Saint Bartolomeo, carved by Marco d'Agate.

Turning towards the centre of the Church, it is possible to admire the presbytery, completely designed by Pellegrini , as are the flooring designs. In the centre on a wide set of steps is the main altar; on each side of the pulpits, suspended around two pillars, and further back, the organ with beautiful painted doors. Behind the altar is the elegant canopied ciborium, and all around the back of the altar are magnificently carved walnut choir stalls.

When you stand in front of the altar and look up, you will see a red light shining to show the presence of the Holy Nail kept inside a gilded copper protection. According to tradition, this is one of the nails from the cross of Christ, donated to Saint Ambrose by the emperor Theodosius, but legend has it that it was Saint Ambrose himself who found the nail in a workshop where a blacksmith was trying to bend it in vain under the hammer. Every year in September, the archbishop of Milan climbs up to take it from its protection during an exciting ceremony, and shows it to the faithful. He is transported by the Nivola: a special picturesque elevator in the shape of a cloud, made of wood, iron and painted papier maché.