

FRANCAVILLA AL MARE

4) San Franco – the interior

Piazza S. Franco, 66023 Francavilla Al Mare (CH)

On entering the church of Santa Maria Maggiore one remains surprised by the vast central space and the natural light that filters down through the high windows. The white walls rise up to form the vault in which there is a silhouette of a huge cross. The white impact is softened by a series of holes in the concave cover and the metal cables which link the peak of the vault to the octagonal shaped room.

It is worth observing the mixture of lights and shadows, the central section filled with light contrasts with the semidarkness of the ambulatory sides. A terracotta frieze along the church wall by Andrea and Pietro Cascella represents the opposition between the hard life on earth and faith in God.

There are also white statues by Pietro Cascella in the presbytery for example : the high altar, the choir, the ambo and the Paschal candle. Recently the floor has been resurfaced in polychrome bricks and the presbytery area has been restored where a large silver cross of Raimondo Volpe is on display.

The windows with decorated grilles in wrought iron again made by the Cascellas have been replaced with polychrome panels.

On the back wall there is the silhouette of the monument by Pietro Cascella which symbolizes the military destruction of Francavilla and its rebirth. The side walls are decorated with the stations of the Cross, works of Andrea Cascella.

Joined to the church there is a collection of treasures. The most important piece is a monstrance by Nicola of Guardagrele dated 1413. A fine example of late gothic chiseled silver jewellery and enriched by enamels. A hexagonal shrine stands on a spiral base and inside there is a small statue of the virgin Mary holding a half moon on which the consecrated wafer is placed. On the upper border of the shrine there are some small statues of the apostles while on the fretted pyramid shaped cover there is the image of San Michele Arcangelo. Among the other treasures there is a silver bust of San Franco, a seventeenth century work of art by the Neapolitan school, a thurible from the sixteenth century and a painting of San Franco by Pietro Annigoni.

Abruzzo Audioguide

