Peace be with you! Brothers there is an arresting phrase in our second reading from the Book of Revelation: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” The “him”, of course, is Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who loves us, and it is Jesus Christ who frees us from our sins by his blood. But why?

Why by his blood? This phrase from the Book of Revelation is reminiscent of an exchange between Saint Anselm and his young student Boso who also asks: Why? Not why did Jesus have to die? But why did Jesus have to die for our sin this way? Why did Jesus have to die tortured to death? Why did he have to die as a common criminal pinned to a cross? Why did he have to die beaten to a bloody pulp so that when nailed to the cross the scent of his blood would attract vulture who would pick at his flesh?

St. Anselm’s response to young Boso is very telling. He says: “You have not considered the gravity of sin.” What St. Anselm is getting here is that in the bloody death of Jesus Christ on the cross, we have a sacrifice that – not only meets – but exceeds any sin of the world. Jesus – innocent and without sin – descends into the most God-forsaken reaches of our world.

“You have not considered the gravity of sin.” Those words of St. Anselm to Boso might be the same words that best capture the failure of us bishops in light of the sexual abuse scandal. The same might be said with the many scandals of the wealthy and powerful in Hollywood and the rise of the #metoo movement. The exposure of sexual scandals among the luminaries of politics, business and entertainment a profound abuse of power.

This “gravity of sin” takes on a different hue in the aftermath of late term abortion legalization in states such as New York. Pink lights illuminated the post 9/11 Twin Towers as a kind of macabre celebration with cheerleading by political leaders who identify as Catholic.

Similarly, this gravity of sin can be seen in the lives of our undocumented. I cannot help but reflect on our PREPARES volunteer who worked with a young Spanish speaking woman in one of our rural communities. She went into labor at 36 weeks. Her husband drove his wife and our volunteer to the nearest hospital 50 miles away. The husband was picked up for speeding and then later deported. It sometimes seems as though the undocumented are asked to make the greatest sacrifices on behalf of the unborn. “The gravity of sin.”

Brothers when we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we remind ourselves and our people that – in the words of Revelation – that it is Jesus Christ who loves us, and it is Jesus Christ who
frees us from our sins by his blood. Jesus descends bearing love and light to the darkest corners of every age.

As Father Gary Zender reminded us today, our scrutiny prayers on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent remind us of the all-pervasive power of Christ’s death to overcome every sin, every evil, every injustice and every wrong from every person and every community of every age. This descent is at the heart of our service in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It lies at the center of every celebration of the Eucharist and every absolution we give, and we receive for the remission of sins.

So thank you! Thank you for your great commitment as priests here in the Diocese of Yakima. Thank you for walking with our people – descending into the darkest places of their lives. Thank you for bearing with them the cross of Christ. Thank you for allowing yourselves to draw close to the blood of Christ in their sufferings. Your lives reflect the message from our Book of Hebrews: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” May those words become our words!” May we rejoice at a God who even descends into hell to bring salvation to every corner of creation! Peace be with you!