Peace be with you! What is the legacy of faith we will leave? That is not only the question we all pose to you, but it is also the central question of the post resurrection and ascension community that surrounds Jesus, Son of Mary and Son of God.

How might we grasp this legacy of faith? Permit me to start with St. Anselm who is the saint we remember today according to the Church calendar. In a famous exchange, the young student Boso asks his teacher St. Anselm: Why? Not simply why did Jesus have to die? But why did he have to die tortured to death? Why did he have to die in the most horrible way: Crucified. Roman citizens facing the death penalty would be beheaded by the sword, but common criminals were deliberately crucified for bloody theatrics. The person to be crucified would be first scourged so that the scent of the blood would attract vultures who would pick at the victim’s flesh, while the weight of the weakened body would slowly suffocate him to death. The Roman senator Cicero referred to crucifixion as “the most extreme form of punishment.”

Why did Jesus have to die this way? St. Anselm’s answer to young Boso is very telling: “You have not considered the weight of sin.” In other words, the horrific death of Jesus gives us the dark assurance that there is not one corner of creation that escapes the salvific power of the cross. Jesus takes on all of the world’s suffering, all of the world’s dysfunction, and all of the world’s sin. We are not only forgiven, but Jesus takes upon himself the damage that remains from sin even after we are forgiven. This is how we understand “redemption.” Jesus literally redeems us from the darkness of sin. Through his bodily resurrection, Jesus overcomes all forms of physical and spiritual death, including the death that comes from sin. The power of this cross-and-resurrection
even ripples out in such a way that, as Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI once noted in an Easter homily, that God does not allow any kind of suffering to “…drift into the past unnoticed.”

Fr. Dan Steele in his homily this last Sunday suggested that the “resurrection” is like the reset on our cell phone or computer. When our lives are contaminated with operating viruses, when we find our responses sluggish and slow; when our resistance to sin and temptation grind down the basic operating system of Christianity, we hit the reset and all is restored. Even more, we discover we are a new creation; we have a different operating system; we have been divinized.

Pivoting to our scriptures today, this is perhaps why Jesus says to Nicodemus “You must be born from above.” Through the sacraments of the Church we are continually being divinized, made to live and breathe and have our being in and through the Risen Lord. This is why I am so grateful to all of you: our donors and benefactors to Catholic Charities here in Central Washington, to the Central Washington Catholic Foundation, and to the communion of parishes that are the Diocese of Yakima. The Central Washington Catholic Foundation in its support of our school and parish programs focuses on passing on a legacy of faith. Catholic Charities through its 210,000 client assists each year provides a legacy of hope, and the witness of our 39 parishes and 3 missions provides the witness of love. Faith, hope and love. These are the three theological virtues embedded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. These form the great legacy of faith you leave for us today.

Our opening reading from the Acts of the Apostles today notes that “The community of believers was of one heart and one mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.” To you, our donors and benefactors, I want to thank you for the many ways you embody those words. Thank you for continuing the legacy of faith, hope and love noted and recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Thank you for imitating St. Anselm and allowing your financial gifts to teach the “young Bosos” of our own day. Thank you for your “Legacy of Faith” you share with us now and that you will be sharing for the next generation of believers.” Your generosity points to the miracle of Jesus dying horrifically on the cross, but then conquering such a terrible death by rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. My hope and prayer is that the words Jesus gives to Nicodemus live on in you and that you, this Easter, will experience in your spiritual lives that rebirth from above. Peace be with you!