What's the one thing that a person needs to hear over, and over, and over again in their life? (Call out if you know the answer…) That they are loved. ***Turn to the person next to you and say, "You are loved."*** But today isn't ***just*** about being ***told*** we are loved. It's about learning how to **hear and receive God the Father's voice**—because the same voice that spoke to Jesus at His baptism is the same voice who speaks to us. The problem (or the challenge) is not that God is silent but that many people have never learnt how to listen.

I was reminded of this in a very personal way on Friday morning. Fr Gerard and I had been up till nearly 11pm the night before in Mapleton, hearing confessions for 200 teens at Ignite Summer Camp. By the time I sat down to begin writing this homily on Friday morning, I was running on empty—not just physically, but emotionally. After pouring myself out for others, I realised I wasn't just tired; I was needing to ***hear again*** that I am deeply loved. **Turn to the person next to you and say, *"God loves you."***

Most of us begin learning that we are loved through our parents. In my family, the words "I love you" weren't said very often, but I never doubted it because love was shown in hugs, smiles, and encouragement. Thankfully, we've progressed from there because these days we end phone calls by saying "Love you!" (click) and hang up as quickly as possible… Like a parent's love, ***God's love*** is not ***just*** something we believe in theory, it's something that's **spoken and given**—over and over and over—mediated through Jesus by His Spirit. As Jesus says, **"You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit"** (Jn 15:16). And so, when we ***pray***, when we celebrate the ***sacraments***—in

essence, when we open our hearts—it's Jesus Himself who reaches into our lives and says, *"I have chosen you."*

When a person is baptised, they are chosen and adopted as a daughter or son of God. And like a child with their parents, they being the journey of learning how to recognise and experience God's love. The first reading is dripping with language which points to ***both*** God's love for His Son, and for all those who are baptised: *"Here is my servant [God says]... my chosen one, in whom my soul delights, whom I have endowed with my Spirit <u>for a purpose</u>... I have called* ***you,*** *I have taken* ***you*** *by the hand and formed* ***you;*** *I have appointed* ***you*** *<u>for a purpose</u>."* And what is that purpose? To actively accompany others so that they may come to realise the truth: that Jesus loves them, that he died for them, and that they, too, have a purpose to do the same. This is exactly what Peter is communicating to Cornelious in the second reading: ***"The truth I have now come to realise,*** [Peter writes], ***is that "God doesn't have favourites;" that God's love is for all people.***

On Friday morning, when I was struggling, really needing to know that I am loved, I started the day with a walk from Kings Beach, around the headland to Moffat Beach, and back up Edmund St. Near the highest point of the Headland, I stopped and sat down in a secluded spot to pray, out of sight from the footpath. It was there, overlooking the sea, that the Psalm for today stuck me. In the second stanza, we heard, ***"The Lord's voice resounding on the waters... the voice of the Lord, full of power, the voice of the Lord, full of splendour."*** And I remember thinking, "Here I am with a near identical view as the Psalmist, and all *I* can hear is the white noise of the surf and the howling of the Easterly wind; where is God?" Then I checked myself and asked, "Have I really sought to

listen?" So I closed my eyes and realised that ***in*** the white noise of the surf and the wind, my mind was crystal clear, with no distractions. In that moment, I was given the words of Psalm 46, which are familiar to many people here today: "Be still and know that I am God." In that moment I was blessed with peace, as we sung in the Psalm response, and received the intimate knowledge of being loved by God.

At Jesus' baptism, the Father spoke to Him: *"You are my beloved Son; my favour rests on you."* That voice was not just for Jesus. In baptism, that same word is spoken to us because we are chosen by God and belong to God. Yes, sometimes sin dulls our hearing; sometimes the voices of busyness, fear, or seeking comfort and familiarity are louder. But the deeper truth remains: ***God is always speaking*** —and what He says never changes. So, before all else, and certainly before we ***can*** carry out our purpose of accompanying others, we must first receive this truth over, and over, and over—gently, quietly, and personally. Let's conclude by proclaiming the truth of who we are by ***turning once more to the person next to us and saying, "You are God's beloved. His favour rests on you."***