photo: cc Stefan Hibi

WHAT'S THIS CHAPTER ALL ABOUT?

"Wait, who is she dating?"--"Did you see what she was wearing?"--"Dude, are you going to run for a position in the house?"--"Are you signing up for the intramural flag football team?"--"I need to get that job to boost my resume."--"I wish I looked more like her, she is so beautiful and all the guys love her."--"If only my girlfriend was as hot as his."--"Did you get invited to their formal? Who are you going with?"

We know the game, grasping at all of these things to create and maintain our image in Greek life. But seeking our identity in all these passing things is exhausting. I, too, felt that pressure once I rushed Pi Beta Phi. I hadn't drunk in high school, so I figured I could continue that trend in college, right? Wrong. I fell into the pressure to conform. I went to the parties every weekend. I found my worth in who I hooked up with, what parties I attended, what I was wearing to those parties, and how my GPA came out in spite of it all. A year in, I discovered that it was a dead-end road. My sophomore year, I hit rock bottom. I sat in my dorm room and wondered why I wasn't fulfilled even though I was popular with a killer social life and kept the academics at "pearl-worthy level." I remember looking at my best friend and asking her, "Why do you get out of bed in the morning?" I had lost all sense of purpose in the midst of frantically clinging to my image, which I had constructed around me to make me "happy."

God spoke to me through a poster. As a sophomore and totally lost, I was walking to lunch one day with my friends and there it was: "STUDY ABROAD IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC!" with all these pictures, and something inside said I needed to do just that. So... I found myself a few months later on a plane to the Dominican Republic with a group of students I didn't know, to a place where I could barely speak the language. Talk about being ripped out of a comfort zone! But it was there in that country, with those poor people that I encountered Christ most profoundly and found my true self in the midst of it all.

We lived with families who totally took us in. They loved me so deeply and yet they didn't know my killer dance moves, stylish outfits, outstanding GPA, who I was dating, or where my resume predicted I would go in the future. But they loved me for my very person, and who I was at the core.

I FOUND MY **TRUE SELF**

This experience illustrates how madly in love God is with each of us. That is, He loves us because we are MADE TO BE LOVED, because He made us with a dignity that transcends these passing things to which we cling for our worth. This love is exactly where peace lies, and this is the ultimate source of happiness which we are all seeking.

When we allow God to be God and love us for who we are, that experience of being loved helps us step out of ourselves and have a heart open to the wants and needs of others. When I knew how I was loved, I could step out of my own petty concerns. It's our hope that this study can serve to liberate you from the chains of seeking your worth in what you've constructed around you. I don't know what your "Dominican Republic Moment" is, but I know that He has one for you, because He desires each of His children to be free and FULLY ALIVE.

WHAT INFLUENCES YOUR VIEWS ON IMAGE?

Explore what drives your clinging to image:

Approval and Appreciation

"If I wear enough make-up, spend enough money on the most expensive beauty products, or take enough trips to the gym and tanning bed - then I will get the approval that I crave."

"If I wear expensive brand name clothing, then I will get the respect I want."

Emotional and Physical Comfort

"If I look at beautiful men or women in magazines or watch pornography on the Internet it will make me feel less empty."

Security and Control

"If I spend enough money on beauty enhancement procedures, then I can control the way I look or slow down the aging process." Interesting fact: Plastic surgery has increased 754% since 1997.

"I can control the way I look in the mirror by not eating enough food or over-exercising."

Influence and Power

"I will only invite the most attractive or talented people into my group of friends or organization so that we will be more desirable or powerful."

"If I date someone really attractive, then it will make me look good too."

"If I ditch my old friends for these new, more respected friends, then it will feel like I'm moving up in the world."

"If I gossip or make fun of the way they look today it will make me feel better about myself.

How do you see people in the Greek System constructing their image to create their worth?

How have you experienced others around you using beauty to get approval, power, comfort, or control? How have you done this?

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT IMAGE?

Read some of the following passages:

Genesis 1:27 Wisdom 13:5 1 Samuel 16:7

Proverbs 31:30 Ephesians 4:22-24 1 Timothy 4:8 1 Peter 3:3-4

How do these verses change the way you view image?

What do you think is the biggest hurdle to your viewing yourself the way that God sees you?

The Catechism explains this awesome dignity that our being made in God's image is without detracting from the rest of creation: "The manifold perfections of creatures-their truth, their goodness, their beauty-all reflect the perfection of God (CCC 41).

Here is what St. Augustine has to say:

"People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long course of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering."

Have you wondered at yourself? What did you think?

WHAT IS THE **CATECHISM**?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

A book clarifying and collecting the teaching of the Catholic Church all in one place. Various people developed catechisms throughout history to explain and teach the Church's teaching. Today's catechism is the most extensive and was published by the Church in 1994. It is organized into four sections, and paragraphs are numbered for easy reference.

Why do you think it's worth it to stop clinging to your image?

How can we keep focused on eternity in the midst of college life?

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Below are a few ways we can allow God to redeem our image

Spend Time with Your Creator (And Biggest Fan)

God created you in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). By coming to know God better, you will come to know yourself better.

Try to spend 10-15 minutes of quiet time each day reading the Bible and allowing the Lord to speak to your heart. If you don't know where to start with prayer or Bible reading, your Bible study leader can help you out.

Take advantage of opportunities for retreats, conferences, and events put on by your campus' Newman Center or Catholic Campus Ministry.

Go to Mass every Sunday and even try attending daily Mass a few days during the week.

Give God Your Yes

God really gets to work in our hearts and helps reveal our true selves to us when we say "Yes" to Him and His plan for us. A great example of this is Mary's "Yes" when the Angel Gabriel tells her she'll be pregnant with Jesus. (Luke 1:26-38)

Raise Your Standards

Who are you trying to be like? People who are famous and trending on Twitter because of their latest scandal, or those remembered centuries after their death because of their strong character and devotion to God and others? We have the example of the saints to inspire us.

You can learn a lot about a saint with a simple internet search. This week, try looking up a few saints and pick an aspect of their lives or character you'd like to imitate. Need somewhere to start? Try looking up saints who share you name, or are the patron saint of something you like to do. And don't forget about Mary and St. Joseph. They're great examples to imitate.

Seek True Beauty and its Source

God is the author of beauty and the source of all that is good. It is said that we find God in things that are true, good, and beautiful.

Make an effort to find something truly beautiful and/or astounding in God's creation, such as a sunset, a mountain, a river, even a blade of grass. Think of all that must happen for it to grow, and reflect on the love God has for you to have you experience such wonderful gifts of beauty.