

# To Know To Believe To Live – Module 2 Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

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## WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD (*IMAGO DEI*)

### I. Biblical Origins and Interpretation:

- A. “God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness.’” -Genesis 1: 26
  - 1. The plural reference to God is how the sacred writer would have depicted something very majestic.
- B. “God created humans in God’s image, in the divine image God created them; male and female God created them.” -Genesis 1:27
- C. The Hebrew word for “created” is stated three times in verses 26-27 which is done grammatically for emphasis and for distinction from the rest of creation for whom “created” is only used once
- D. Precise meaning of *imago Dei* is debated within Catholicism and among Christians
- E. General Interpretation: We “resemble” God in some way that is different from the rest of creation. St. Irenaeus taught that “in the totality of who we are, body and soul” we are images of God.
  - 1. Humanity is considered the pinnacle of creation and possesses a dignity that belongs to both our body and soul (this gives our bodies as well as our souls an inherent dignity)
- F. All of us bear a divine imprint that is distinct from the rest of creation
- G. Discussion Questions:
  - 1. What is your first reaction when you hear that you are created “in the image of God?” Describe your reaction.
  - 2. Do you believe you are “made in the image of God?” If so, what makes it possible for you to believe this? If not, what makes it difficult for you to believe this?
  - 3. If you believe you are made in the image of God, in what ways do you see/experience the image of God in yourself (e.g., your personality, being, talents, body, gender, thinking, actions, etc.)?

### II. Meaning of *Imago Dei*:

- A. We are called to be God’s collaborators, stewards in promoting the Reign of God in the world (we are God’s voices, hands, and feet). This is unique to humans as nothing else in creation is invited to this work (this is the meaning of “have dominion over everything” in Gen. 1:28)
- B. Those who, for any number of reasons, cannot serve as a collaborator, are no less an *imago Dei*.
- C. Reflecting the image of God has nothing to do with what one can do but simply by the nature of being a human. Even if we cannot collaborate, that does not change who we are as *imago Dei*.

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D. Example: a car is a vehicle whose design and purpose is to move across land while a boat is a vehicle whose design and purpose is to move across water. The car may have a flat tire and the boat may have a hole in its side that prevent them from executing their normal function, but no one would look at a car/boat with a flat tire/hole and say that the flat tire/ hole changes what it is. (Example adapted from Lenny Esposito)

E. Discussion Questions:

1. Who you “are” as a human defines you as one made in the image of God rather than what you “do.” When was the last time you were just able to “be” and have it appreciated or valued by yourself and/or others?
2. How does a world that defines our value/worth by what we “do” impact you as valuable/worthwhile simply because you “are?”
3. How might God be inviting you to be God’s voice, hands, and feet in the world?

III. Implications of Being Made in the Image and Likeness of God:

A. Catholic social doctrine is based principally upon the belief that all of humanity, without exception, is made in the image and likeness of God.

B. Consequences: consistent ethic of life from conception to natural death, pursuit of the common good, solidarity, equitable sharing of the goods of the earth, racial/ethnic unity, etc. are of critical importance because of our shared humanity as the image and likeness of God

C. Discussion Questions:

1. How does the meaning of *imago Dei* impact your perception of and inform your behavior towards people with disabilities, the infirmed, the elderly, the unborn, the incarcerated, the foreigner, the poor, those of another race/culture, religion, sexual orientation, etc.? Which one is challenging for you?
2. If all humanity is created in God’s image, what does this mean for us as a society, especially when it comes to those whom our society deems “imperfect” or “unworthy” through its laws, social norms, normative way of life, commonly accepted behaviors and attitudes, etc.?

IV. Optional Post-Session Reflection (For Group Discussion at Start of Next Module):

Reflect on where you are currently in knowing, believing, and living that you and every other human are made in the image and likeness of God **AND** how you might be invited to take another step forward growing in this area of faith.