The Lunchroom

It was not an easy task to live up to the endless expectations

To serve as an African American female who is an undergraduate student

In an engaging environment that identifies as Saint Elizabeth University

Providing students with endless opportunities to spread their wings and soar

When I am granted the wonderful chance to wake up every day and be better

Better than I was yesterday

Better than I was last semester

Better than I was last school year

Better than I was before I committed to this school

Better than the woman I was yesterday

Because Saint Elizabeth strives to find the better

In each and every individual

Even after they have succeeded in every existing aspect

Waking up in O’Connor residence hall was not the hardest part of my day

As the sun grows bright in my dorm room

It was getting out of bed and figuring out

How can I be better than the student I was yesterday

Because this community pushes me beyond my strengths

To be a successful being in every aspect of my life each and every moment

The most challenging task is the lunchroom

Rose dining hall at eleven in the morning is dreadfully beautiful

Because you see the majority of the community already in a joyful manner

Due to the completion of their day

That consists of athletic commitments, morning classes, employment, and much more

As I gather my plate that warms my soul to remind me of a home-cooked meal

From my mother who has rushed home to provide a meal for my hungry stomach

After her long shift at work that greeted her with traffic due to rush hour

From other individuals working hard to get home from a long day of work

Because humans are social creatures that thrive in community

I stare blankly to find a comfortable seat in the cafeteria

A belonging

A wanting

An identity

As I built the courage to dine in on a chilly Wednesday

Just like the kind of weather that you can get away with

A light jacket on the boardwalk as the waters of the shore

Provide waves of salt as a complimenting body perfume

While you take a stroll as the wind blows calmy on your face

Without any recognizable friends by my side to accompany me

It was hard to see myself fitting in this lunchroom

And ultimately this university as I identified students who were

And find my place when I was surrounded by successful students

It made me feel like I was not doing enough even on the days I felt burned out

As a double major in the Nursing and English field

I look in an anxious manner both ways as my plate begins to get cold

From standing with a pale face of fear in a crowd that does not recognize my name

Enough to invite me to their table because I am only acquainted with them

Through smiles and quick conversations that last as long as a walk-by

Like a stranger you make eye contact with at a New York subway station

Until I hear a voice that screams with happiness to see my spirit

I look around to identify where the sound is coming from

And see a student that waved to me as we walked out together

From our 9:45am English course in Santa Maria

And comforted me with a waving gesture to sit with them

To discuss our assignment due the following class

I felt welcomed at this moment

As if I found a person that was meant to recognize me as an individual

Who deserves to be noticed

And as we sat down and I glanced around

There were more smiles and waves in my direction

With excitement to see my presence in the dining hall

As if they have been waiting to see me all day long

I felt part of the community

As I finally recognized my place in it because others acknowledge mine

Which is the greatest thing about this school

The community takes time to identify each individual as a name rather than a number

Because this campus becomes a home when the community comes together to build it as one

And now I know that on the days I wake up alone feeling lost

I can remember that this community is rooting for me on the sidelines

To ensure that I still thrive even on the days I feel burnout

When I am not as successful to feel like a name and find myself as a number

Because there is always that one person waiting for my face

To greet me with a smile and conversation that brings joy to know that I am noticed

Because they are waiting for me and to recognize my worth in the lunchroom

Because human beings belong in relationships and communities

And Saint Elizabeth is where that can be found