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The geocentric model of the universe had been the dominant concept of the universe for a long time in human history. This theory puts the earth in the centre of the universe and argues that the Sun, the Moon, and other planets circle the earth.

Nicolaus Copernicus was the first scientist who proved that it's wrong. He published the heliocentric system in his book by putting the Sun in the centre of the universe. And then, Galileo Galilei had developed the Copernican view of the solar system and won fame in the scientific community.

Regarding the conflict between the heliocentric system and the teachings of the Bible, Galileo said in 1613, “The Bible teaches how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.” From then on, he received unwanted attention from the church and in the end was brought before the pope in 1633, convicted of heresy, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He also had to publicly renounce the Copernican theory.

From today's perspective, this historical event looks nonsense, but from the day's religious belief, his theory couldn't be accepted. It took 350 years after his death before the church admitted the religious trial was wrong and apologised to him. This story shows us how dangerous a fixed idea can be.

Have you watched the film titled ‘Hotel Rwanda’? The movie is based on a true story of the Rwandan Genocide. In 1994, nearly 1 million Rwandans lost their lives in fewer than 100 days because of the severe ethnic conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi. The two tribes' hatred goes back to the Belgian colonial era.

The Belgian government gave power to the Tutsi minority so that they might control the Hutu majority. After independence, the two parties' relationship became worse and worse, and finally, in the course of the Hutu Power movement the genocidal mass slaughter of the Tutsi was carried out by the Hutu majority.

Yes, fixed ideas can paralyse or destroy our ability of ethical judgement. Throughout history, we can easily find so many examples showing how horrible religious, cultural, political or racial bias is. If we were fixed to some belief system, we would become narrow and relentless in judging and exploiting others based on our prejudices.

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According to today’s Gospel reading, Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus was also harassed by people’s strong bias. In verses 18-19 Jesus says as follows: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’”

Most of the religious leaders in those days hated John the Baptist and Jesus Christ because their lifestyle and teachings weren’t in accordance with their religious traditions. Especially Jesus’ argument, that he was the Messiah sent by God, was serious blasphemy to them. So they crucified him like a felon.

The entire process of Jesus’ trial wasn’t fair, and the religious leaders did everything needed to kill Jesus. For them, Jesus was a very dangerous figure against their religious system. Likewise, even the Son of God was a great victim of the fixed ideas of human beings.

Jesus’ analogy in verses 16-17 gives us an insight into the life occupied by strong bias. Jesus says, “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: ‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’”

He compared the day’s generation as the children blaming each other for indifference. Since they were absorbed with what they wanted to do, they didn’t want to change their preferences and didn’t try to learn or communicate with others.

This indifference is a core feature of those people occupied by strong bias. When we close our minds to different thoughts, we will lose empathetic abilities to understand others and learn new things, which in the end isolates ourselves. Jesus revealed clearly that this exclusiveness might deprive us of the truth.

Let us go back to verses 18-19 again: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’”

The attitude of excluding what they didn’t like drove them to throw opportunities to experience the truth and even stand against God’s will regardless of their intention. They couldn’t join in John’s baptism of repentance, and they also

couldn't enjoy Jesus' party for celebrating God's salvation. Their spiritual insensitiveness was the result of their religious narrowness.

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One of the highlights of such spiritual insensitiveness is the event of raising Lazarus from the dead. At that time Jesus wanted to glorify God by saving his life. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Martha and Mary and some friends were disappointed at Jesus' late arrival.

Jesus proclaimed to them, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” And then, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” and the dead man came out.

Jesus showed through this event that every believer will be resurrected in God's time by their faith. What an incredible miracle! But, John 11:53 reports to us something more unbelievable than the event; it says, “From that day on the high priests and the Pharisees plotted to take Jesus' life.”

According to the passage, some of them saw the miracle with their own eyes, but they weren't surprised or impressed with the divine wonder. Rather, they felt alarmed and made the plot to kill Jesus. Verses 47-48 explain the reason why; they said, “Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

They thought that Jesus was an anti-Roman activist, and if he gathered forces against the Roman Empire, they would lose everything. They totally misunderstood Jesus and distorted his ministry, so couldn't dance or mourn with him. Yes, they were exactly like the children in the marketplaces.

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The film ‘Hotel Rwanda’ mentioned before is a true story of Paul Rusesabagina. Paul managed a hotel in Kigali during the Rwanda Genocide and tried to protect the Tutsi refugees by opening the hotel as a refugee camp and using the goods

for negotiating with the mob. He risked his life, but thanks to his courage and sacrifice more than 1,200 Tutsi people survived.

Paul was a Hutu, but he saved Tutsi because his wife was a Tutsi. He had already developed a good relationship with the Tutsi people. His story tells us that the best way to break our bias against someone or something is to try to know them personally.

If we talk to people personally, if we know their life-stories deeply, we wouldn't be so quickly influenced by what we've heard, learnt, or read before. In this respect, it isn't strange that most people who met Jesus personally could believe in him overcoming all the criticisms or lies. Only those who have personal experiences of Jesus can follow in his footsteps.

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Sisters and brothers,

Living like the children in the marketplaces is dangerous and unwise. Such people cannot be touched or impressed by any divine wonder or any good news if it isn't in accordance with their theory. They are living in their own world. Let us keep breaking the walls of our thinking and experiences, and accept Jesus as he is. Then, we can rejoice with him when he rejoices with those who rejoice and weep with him when he weeps with those who weep. Amen.