

Wonderfully Complicated

4th Sunday of Advent (Year A)

December 21, 2025

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Many of us at one point in our lives will be presented with a complex moral dilemma that has no apparent answer. In moments like this, we will need to get advice from those we trust, look into Church teaching, and spend a lot of time in prayer. Whatever our final decision may be, we should always remember that God is with us. Even if we did something wrong in the first place to put us in that situation, God is still with us.

In today's Gospel, Joseph was faced with a complex moral dilemma. Was he to continue with the marriage with Mary or divorce her quietly? Because our current understanding of marriage is so different, we might not fully understand the dilemma. Nonetheless, we know that it was a serious dilemma that bothered him and one that could make other people think less of him either way.

Unfortunately, at a time when people most need the support of the Church, the sacraments, and other people whenever they are in complex moral situations, they often find themselves isolated and judged. In his 2016 document 'The Joy of Love,' Pope Francis addressed this issue head on. In his controversial Chapter

8, 'Accompanying, Discerning, and Integrating Weaknesses,' Pope Francis reached out in support with mercy and understanding to all those in complex moral situations. Like the angel sent to Joseph in his dream in the Gospel, Pope Francis did not want them to feel alone or afraid. Against those in the Church who wanted and continue to want everything rigorously defined with no room for ambiguity or confusion, he reminded the Church that not every situation has a law to resolve it. He wrote, "it is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual's actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being."

(304) In other words, for as important as laws and rules are, they need careful discernment in their application to concrete situations and actual people. Even St. Thomas Aquinas knew that there cannot be a law in place for every single situation that ever exists. Pope Francis continued, "I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, 'always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.'" (308) Pope Francis acknowledges, and perhaps even celebrates, that we as human beings are 'wonderfully complicated.' (308)

Joseph's complex moral dilemma should make us more understanding of the complex moral dilemmas that so many of us face in life.

How do I respond to others who are going through complex moral issues? In what ways can I hold to my convictions and religious beliefs without pushing them further away?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for a Church of mercy and understanding. Following the example of Pope Francis, may we learn to accompany those in complex moral dilemmas, help them discern what to do, and if necessary, even integrate their weaknesses and ours in the way forward.