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Pope Francis delivers the Angelus noon prayer from his studio's window overlooking St.Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Sunday, Jan. 14, 2024. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

by Associated Press

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Pope Francis has defended his controversial decision to let priests bless same-sex couples but admitted that "solitude is a price you have to pay" when you make difficult decisions.

Francis doubled down and insisted that the "Lord blesses everyone," during a Jan. 14 interview with an Italian talk show. But he acknowledged the remarkable opposition his decision has sparked — Africa's bishops have united in a continent-wide refusal to implement the Vatican declaration and individual bishops in Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere have also voiced opposition.

Vatican's Dec. 18 declaration restated traditional church teaching that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman. But it allowed priests to offer spontaneous, non-liturgical blessings to same-sex couples seeking God's grace in their lives, provided such blessings aren't confused with the rites and rituals of a wedding.

During an appearance on "Che Tempo Che Fa," Frances acknowledged, in his first comments since the uproar, the "resistance" the decision has generated. He blamed it on bishops not really understanding the issue and refusing to open a dialogue about it.

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Asked if he felt alone, Francis replied: "You take a decision and solitude is a price you have to pay."

"Sometimes decisions are not accepted," he said. "But in most cases, when you don't accept a decision, it's because you don't understand."

The danger, he said, is that when people who don't understand refuse to enter into a "brotherly discussion" and instead harden their hearts, resist and "make ugly conclusions."

"This has happened with these last decisions about blessing everyone," Francis said. "The Lord blesses everyone."