Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Leo speaks to a group.

Pope Leo XIV speaks to participants in a conference on "Mysticism, Mystical Phenomena and Holiness," in the Vatican audience hall Nov. 13. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — November 13, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A Catholic who reported having had some sort of mystical experience is not automatically a candidate for sainthood, Pope Leo XIV said, but such a report is not a reason to dismiss a candidate either.

Mysticism is "an experience that surpasses mere rational knowledge — not because of the merit of the one who lives it, but through a spiritual gift that may manifest itself in different, even apparently opposite, ways, such as radiant visions or deep darkness, afflictions or ecstasies," the pope said.

Leo met Nov. 13 with participants in a three-day conference on "Mysticism, Mystical Phenomena and Holiness," sponsored by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the dicastery that examines the lives of proposed saints, told the conference Nov. 10 that holiness "consists fundamentally in love for God and for neighbor," which can be expressed in a variety of ways and is "not necessarily accompanied by extraordinary, mystical or charismatic graces."

In fact, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, who addressed the conference the following day, said that while there have been about 3,500 canonizations and beatifications in the past 50 years, the Catholic Church has recognized as "supernatural" only three or four mystical phenomena.

The relationship between mystical phenomena and holiness of life "is one of the most beautiful dimensions of the experience of faith," Leo told the group, thanking them for contributing "both to appreciating it and to shedding light on certain aspects that require discernment."

"Through theological reflection as well as preaching and catechesis, the church has recognized for centuries that at the heart of the mystical life lies the awareness of an intimate union of love with God," the pope said. Such an "event of grace" always shows itself by the fruits it produces.

The unusual phenomena "remain secondary and nonessential to mysticism and holiness itself: They may be signs of it, inasmuch as they are particular charisms, but the true goal is and always remains communion with God," he said. They "are not indispensable conditions for recognizing the holiness of a believer."

"What matters most, and what must be emphasized in examining candidates for sainthood, is the candidate's full and constant conformity to the will of God, revealed in Scripture and in the living apostolic tradition," Leo said.

The pope quoted St. Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic, who said: "The highest perfection obviously does not consist in interior delights or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy but in having our will so much in conformity with God's will that there is nothing we know he wills that we do not want with all our desire, and in accepting the bitter as happily as we do the delightful when we know that his majesty desires it."

The church always has and will continue to provide "criteria for distinguishing authentic spiritual phenomena — which can occur in an atmosphere of prayer and sincere seeking of God — from manifestations that may be deceptive," the pope

said. "To avoid falling into superstitious illusion, such events must be evaluated with prudence, through humble discernment in accordance with the teaching of the church."

Advertisement