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Pope Leo XIV gives a blessing after meeting with writers from around the world at the Capitolare Hall of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican June 24, 2026, to mark the 100th anniversary of the Holy See's publishing house, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. (OSV News/Vatican News/Simone Risoluti)

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Pulitzer Prize winners, a Nobel laureate, celebrated novelists and authors from nearly a dozen countries met at the Vatican June 24 for an audience with Pope Leo XIV, who reflected on the importance of books to reveal who we are and "our inner dialogue with God."

"Writing, as you know, is an act of truth, of revelation, for it reveals who we are, what we believe and hope for, the world we strive toward and the future of which we dream," the pope said in his speech to the writers. "In this pursuit of truth, we sense that truth is subtle, revealing itself to us in our inner dialogue with God and in our open and respectful dialogue with our neighbors."

Among those in attendance were Nobel Prize laureate Jon Fosse, a Catholic convert and one of Norway's most decorated writers, along with Pulitzer Prize winners Elizabeth Strout and Marilynne Robinson. Jonathan Safran Foer, author of *Everything Is Illuminated*, and Irish author Colum McCann, who wrote *Let the Great World Spin*, winner of the U.S. National Book Award for Fiction, were also among those who met the pope.

In his remarks to the authors, Leo cited C.S. Lewis' observation that reading a literary text places us in the position of "seeing through the eyes of others," broadening perspectives and developing empathy.

"When we delve into the very depths of our humanity, we are not far from God; for there, in the midst of very human stories, God reveals himself," the pope said.

Strout, whose novel *Olive Kitteridge* won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, described the meeting with the pope as "absolutely lovely."

She said she found deep resonance in Leo's description of writing as "an act of humanity," calling it "absolutely true."

"Only through writing are we ever allowed into somebody else's head," Strout told OSV News. "That's the only way we can ever know what it's like to be another person. And in that way, we can feel a lot less lonely."

On the question of artificial intelligence and the future of the written word, Strout underlined, "I think it's essential that the written word come from a human mind because then it can have a human soul in it as well."

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Lila Azam Zanganeh, a Paris-born author of Iranian heritage and a global ambassador for Libraries Without Borders, described Leo as "completely gracious and beautiful" who made each writer feel that he was present "in a deep and meaningful way."

"He's an amazing listener," she said.

Zanganeh added that she was particularly struck by Pope Leo XIV's emphasis on the link between writing and revelation.

"Words make reality," she said. "Words connect to the spirit and words really move worlds in their own way."

"Parables, stories, fables: they always tell us who we are and what we're made of," she added.

The gathering was held to mark the 100th anniversary of the Holy See's modern publishing house, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, established in 1926 as an independent entity from the Vatican Printing House, which was founded by Pope Sixtus V in 1587.

Leo called on the writers to "create spaces of freedom and authenticity within which divine grace can make the promise of consolation and peace resound."

"We need your imagination, your narrative creativity and your lively thinking," the pope said.

Leo champions printed books

The audience with authors was not the first time Pope Leo XIV has spoken out in defense of the written and printed word. A few weeks before publishing "*Magnifica*

Humanitas: On safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence," the pope gave a speech in which he urged everyone to read books as "an antidote to closed-mindedness."

"When we hold a book in our hands, we ideally encounter its author. But at the same time, we meet those who have read it before us, or who are reading it now or will read it," Leo said.

"In the digital age, the physicality of the book reminds us of the role of thought, reflection and study," the pope added. "Reading nourishes the mind; it helps to foster a conscious and well-formed critical sense, guarding us against fundamentalism and ideological shortcuts."