

DECEMBER 15 2025 FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

A drug enforcement agency officer stepped into and stopped by at a ranch in Texas. He was talking with an old rancher there.

The officer told the rancher: "I need to inspect your ranch for illegally grown drugs." The rancher said: "Okay. But don't go into that field over there." And he pointed out to the location. The officer verbally exploded, saying: "Mister! I have the authority of the federal government with me." Reaching into his rear pants pocket, the arrogant officer removed his badge and proudly displayed it to the rancher. "See this badge?!" the officer said. "This badge means I am allowed to go wherever I wish. On any land, no questions asked, or answers given. Do you understand?"

The rancher nodded politely, apologized, and went about his chores.

A short time later, the old rancher heard loud screams, and looked up to see the officer running for his life, being chased by the rancher's big Santa Gertrudis bull. With every step, the bull was gaining ground on the officer, and it seemed likely that he would get gored before reaching safety. The officer was clearly terrified. The rancher threw down his tools, ran over to the fence, and yelled at the top of his lungs: "Your badge! Show him your badge!"

Sisters and brothers, in today's Gospel reading Jesus is questioned about his authority, and the source of this authority, by the chief priests and the elders.

Today's reading follows immediately after Jesus cleansed the Temple of Jerusalem, driving out all those who were selling, buying, and making business in the temple. And so, Jesus is asked: Who gave you the authority to do all these things?

We know the answer to this question. Jesus' authority comes from God. Jesus, however, does not answer their question directly, because he recognizes that this was not a genuine question. That is, this question did not arise from a real desire to know the truth. It is a question asked in order to find something to accuse him.

Soon, the same chief priests and elders will seek to arrest Jesus, with a view of handing him over to Pilate.

In about 10 days' time, we will celebrate the Feast of Christmas. At the centre of that celebration of Christmas is a newborn child. Our Gospel reading today reminds us that this vulnerable child comes into our world with the authority of God. And in receiving this child, we receive God himself.

The life of this child will be stamped with the authority of God. That is the reason why we take so seriously all that this child went on to say and do, along with his birth, his life, his death, and his resurrection.

Sisters and brothers, today is a good day for us to examine how we exercise the authority that we have received in our lives.

Now don't think, "I don't have any authority." Everyone of us has authority over someone or the other. As priests, parents, grandparents, teachers, employers, and so on, we have some responsibility towards others around us.

And how do we exercise that authority? A person with authority is not someone who controls others. On the contrary, it is to be an agent in releasing the potential that is in people. To be someone who empowers others, following the example of our Lord Jesus.

He did not control people. He invited them to follow him. And he told them very clearly, he came not to be served, but to serve. He did it dramatically when he lowered himself to wash the feet of his disciples. That was an act of authority—the authority of outreaching love.

Today, the choice is ours, whether to exercise our authority to serve others, or to control others. Amen.