

A three-ring circus thrills audiences beyond measure. I mean a real circus, not just the typical American breakfast table. In one ring a fire-eater shoots a flame from his mouth. In another trapeze artists leap through the air at dizzying heights. In another a tamer puts his head in the mouth of a lion. At a circus, one emotion says, "Why would anyone do this?" But another says, "It's thrilling to see people dance with danger and remain unharmed."

The Acts of the Apostles reminds me of a three-ring circus. In parenthesis, let me say something about the Scripture readings of Easter. The Easter season lasts 7 weeks, from Easter to Pentecost. Throughout that time we hear over a hundred Scripture readings at daily and Sunday Mass, but not one of them is from the Old Testament. The usual Old Testament reading which begins the Sunday scriptures is replaced by the Acts of the Apostles. So for seven weeks we soak ourselves in the Christian story.

Acts was written by St. Luke; it forms the sequel to his Gospel. You're familiar with this from the cinema. It's like *Luke II*, or *Son of Luke*, or *Godzilla meets Luke*, or *Three Men and a Little Luke*. It's the second verse. As the Gospel tells the story of Jesus, so Acts tells the story of the Church.

Now, in today's episode, Peter and John have been arrested for preaching. Their sentence is never to preach again. People aren't arrested for preaching anymore; I know what you're thinking: Bring back the good old days.

This whole story reminds me of a circus: Think of how the Church begins: We begin with the assassination of our founder. Then the successors are arrested. And finally the government silences them from ever preaching again. This is no way to start an organization. And yet, look what happens: Jesus rises from the dead; the Apostles are freed; and they preach in spite of the government. When I read this, the circus emotions swell within me: "Why would anyone do this?" And, "It's thrilling to see people dance with danger and remain unharmed."

It's not smart to dance with danger. Kids play with fire. One spouse belittles another. People flirt with extramarital play. It's asking for trouble. When people act like children they should be told like children, "Stop it. It's not smart to dance with danger."

Then, we open up this story, and it's like God is doing the same thing! What kind of a model is this? Arrest, persecution, and death happen to the Apostles right before God's eyes. And God says, "I can handle this; I can handle this." But we want to say, "Stop it!" Or arrest, persecution, and death happen to us. And make the same prayer. "God, please don't play with fire. If you want to play dangerous, play with somebody else. I'll watch the circus, but don't put me in the circus."

The Acts of the Apostles tells how God put himself in one jam after another and escaped without harm. Acts tells us how powerful God is.

If we find ourselves in the lion's cage, God may not take away the lion. But he may tame the lion. After all, God enjoys the circus too.