



Saint Augustine's Church Washington Street Cork —Christmas Day—25th December

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Some of you may be familiar with John Boyne's little book *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

The story centres on a German family, father mother teenage daughter and 8 year old Bruno, and is set in Germany during the Second World War. Bruno's father is a soldier and at the start of the book he has just been promoted to a new commission. All of this means that the family must move from Berlin, where Bruno is very happy and go and live in the country. Only gradually does it emerge that Bruno's father has been promoted to the position of commander of a concentration

camp, and that the camp is obviously Auschwitz... Bruno has no friends to play with in this new location and he is bored and lonely... From his bedroom window in this new house Bruno can see what he thinks is an adjacent farm. At first he thinks he will find new friends there, but he is somewhat puzzled as to why all those working on his farm wear striped pyjamas. As time goes by Bruno grows increasingly bored but he is banned from exploring outside the back yard. One day he gets his chance and climbs over the wall, into the woods beyond. Soon he reaches the fence that surrounds the camp, and after traveling along by the fence for what seem miles, he meets Samuel, a Jewish boy of exactly the same age as himself. The only trouble is that Samuel is on the inside of the fence. Bruno is envious of Samuel whom he believes has plenty of friends to play with while he is stuck out here on his own. There is a simplicity and innocence about Bruno, he doesn't understand why his parents have moved here, he doesn't know what exactly his father does, nor has he any idea what happens inside the camp which he thinks is a farm. For almost a year the two boys meet at the same spot each day and they quickly become the best of friends. One is a Polish Jew, the other the son of the commander of the camp.

Just about this time a number of coincidences occur. Bruno gets head lice and his mother shaves his hair. Samuel's father disappears and cannot be found, and Bruno's mother decides that she and the children are returning to Berlin. With Bruno about to go back to Berlin he meets again with Samuel, who asks him to help him search for his father. Bruno agrees. Samuel steals striped pyjamas for Bruno so that he will fit in in the camp. Bruno takes off his own clothes and puts on the striped pyjamas, and with those clothes and his shaved head he looks exactly the same as any other child his age in the camp. They search without success for Samuel's father. Just about this time it begins to rain, and the two boys get mixed up in a group of people whom they think are going on a march. Neither knows where the march is leading but soon they are crowded into a gas chamber. Bruno thinks they are in there to shelter from the rain. The doors close, the place goes dark, soon it begins to fill with gas, and there are screams and cries. Despite the chaos that followed Bruno found that he was holding Samuel's hand and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go. So still holding hands and dressed alike the boys died together.

Yes I can hear you ask, Mother of God what type of Christmas message is this? Yes I understand the question, but let me explain. The story is a story of friendship and solidarity. Its power hinges on Bruno taking off his own clothes and dressing the same as Samuel. In these new clothes he is not seen as the son of the all-powerful camp commander, but rather as just another dispensable Jewish boy. Then without power or recognition he is executed.

We like the romantic story of the first Christmas, of Jesus born in the stable, of angels and shepherds and kings. It is a cosy and reassuring picture, but as always we need to get beyond the story to the message.

The central message of Christmas is that Christ the Son of God put aside his glory and power, his divine clothes, if you like, and came among us as one like us. Like Bruno he dressed in our clothes; he shared in our weakness our pain our brokenness, and did all of this because he loved each one of us. He came to show us the way to God.

Christmas is about the God who put on human clothes, who was just like any one of us, who was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Who in a different time and place would suffer and die for us out of love.

Thank You

The Augustinian Community here in Washington Street would like to thank each and every one of you for your kindness, friendship and encouragement over the years, and for your support which has manifested itself in so, so many ways. It has been a time of change here in St. Augustine's with some of the existing community moving on to pastures new and an influx of novices to the Cork community. You have made us all very welcome, and the good news is that now some of us at least are coming to terms with the language. We thank you for your guidance, and patience with our mistakes during this transition period. We would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the blessings of the holy season, and extend the hope that the New Year may indeed be a happy and prosperous one.

