4th Sunday of Advent

St. Augustine's Church Limerick

21st December 2025

Fourth Sunday of Advent

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Christmas Mass Times

Christmas Eve
7.30am, 8.30am,
10.15am,
Family Mass
5.00pm
Christmas Eve
Mass 8.00pm

Christmas Day
9.00am, & 11.15am
No evening Mass

Blood Sports at Christmas

Some say the oldest of Irish animals is the hare. The home from which it ranges widely is a shallow nest or "form" in a wide open space. This apparent disregard for danger is based on the protection afforded by exceptional speed. The long hind legs seem to catapult the hare to safety in most circumstances. The same speed puts the hare in mortal danger at Christmas-time for that is the Coursing season. It would be released in front of two greyhounds bred for this very purpose who were competing to decide which was most successful in overtaking, turning or otherwise discommoding—sometimes fatally—the little animal. All he has to rely on is speed to reach temporary safety at an escape hatch hundreds of yards away and sometimes its not enough.

In the middle of the last century, before sensitivity to the pain of wild animals registered with us, we tried to play our own part in this "sport." There was a coursing meeting in Mooncoin, as in several other places, on St Stephen's Day. The committee put out an urgent appeal for hares. They would pay £1 each, around €45 in today's money, a goldmine on our doorstep. The hares were to be delivered to Mooncoin a few days before Christmas for an orientation course. Grand. We would flood them with hares from our fields and the hills beyond and thereby lavishly fund our Christmas. Since it was closed season for salmon-fishing it was easy to borrow a net from a local fisherman. On the ideally dark first night of our campaign we draped the net across a gap we knew to be the departure route of startled hares. From the far end of the field we advanced noisily towards the netted gap and soon we heard the light drumbeat of a bounding hare ahead. This was followed by a pathetic squealing as the little animal sprinted into the net that blocked his ancestral right-of-way. Therein he lay entangled like a big full-forward of the time whose ill-intending lunge had ben side-stepped by the target, a small and nimble goalkeeper. Our dad was the next to emit a yelp of pain. He'd been bitten on the soft part of the thumb as he was handling the captive. The whole hunting party, with the exception of one, found this very funny; we hadn't known that hares might bite even though aware of the damage they did stripping the bark from seedlings and saplings. Then we called a halt with a view to coming back the next night with more nets and a more comprehensive plan. Then, since early success had shown us how to do it, hares in numbers would give themselves up for our purpose. When we got home the first-fruits of our hunting skill was installed in a big wooden box which had probably brought our mother's goods across the parish when she married our father. He showed little sign of settling happily into what comforts we could offer him. He was he spending his first night confined under a roof of any kind other than all-weather wide skies, movement limited only between boundaries set by himself. We told ourselves he would be happier when we put a few companions with him after our next foray. It was a confident party that set out to round them up on the morrow. The nets were set and the beaters deployed more widely and, we thought, more wisely than before. Nothing happened. No sound or movement other than our own disturbed the still winter night. Going home empty-handed we decided we'd give it just one more try. Anyhow, the deadline for delivering hares to Mooncoin was only a couple of days away. But the third sweep, through different fields with promising gaps, was equally fruitless. We knew the game was over. It remained only to release our one captive. We did that in daylight. Younger members of the family gave playful chase as he bounded away. No hound of Mooncoin, tooth or paw, would ever touch him. I'm glad.

At Christmas we are sharply if distantly aware of people suffering at the hands of others. We are bound sometimes to ask why higher powers seem to do nothing about it. Silently, we ask with the poet:

"Does it please you, Sir, that your people's voice
Is the voice of the hare torn between the hounds?"
(Padraig J. Daly: *The Voice of the Hare.* 1997)

J.L.

Reception of Holy Communion

The Augustinian community wishes to make known that, in the interests of hygiene, our preference in distributing communion is on the communicant's hand.

Meditation: Fourth Week of Advent

The angel Gabriel said to Mary, "Do not fear, Mary, you shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus. Great will be his dignity and he will be called Son of the Most High..." Lk. 1

O Jesus, I believe you were born of Mary and are God's Son. Your mysterious coming is beyond understanding. Yet like your holy mother, Mary, I wish that you come to me, for you promised you will. Let me serve you in any way I can and know that you are with me day by day as my life goes by. Like Mary, your mother, though I know you only by faith, may my whole being proclaim your greatness and my spirit rejoice in your favour to me. O Wisdom, holy Word of God, Jesus Christ, holding all things in your strong yet tender hands, come and show us the way to salvation.

If you look for me at Christmas

If you look for Me at Christmas
You won't need a special star-
I'm no longer just in Bethlehem,
I'm right there where your are.
You may not be aware of Me
Amid the celebrations-
You'll have to look beyond the stores
And all the decorations.
But if you take a moment
from your list of things to do
And listen to your heart, you'll find
I'm waiting there for you.
You're the one I want to be with,
You're the reason that I came,
And you'll find Me in the stillness
As I'm whispering your name.

Love, Jesus

Family Mass Christmas Eve 5.00pm

We invite the children to join in our Nativity Play.
Costumes will be provided.
Preparations begin at 4.30pm
We need Angels, Shepherds, Wise men & more...
All are Welcome!

St. Mary's Cathedral Civic Carol Service

December 21st at 7.00pm

Traditional Service of Nine lessons and Carols for Christmas

Thank You

The Augustinian Community would like to thank you for all your support and prayers throughout the year. We wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas and every blessing for the New Year 2026
May God continue to bless us as we journey on together.