

Basilica pastor celebrates Mass for Ravens

Before they stepped into noisy M&T Bank Stadium for the AFC Divisional playoff game Jan. 15, some members of the Baltimore Ravens quietly gathered for morning prayer at their downtown hotel.

Monsignor Arthur Valenzano, pastor of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, celebrated an 8:30 a.m. Mass for Catholic team members at a hotel near the stadium.

"The atmosphere was very prayerful," said Monsignor Valenzano, who was "called off the bench" for Father Christopher Whatley, Ravens' chaplain. Father Whatley, pastor of St. Mark in Catonsville, was visiting a friend recuperating from surgery.

A Protestant service was held for other members of the team at the same time.

Coach John Harbaugh, Center Matt Birk, Defensive Coordinator Chuck Pagano and a few other Ravens attended the Catholic Mass, according to Monsignor Valenzano.

"It was interesting to know so many players take a moment to pray," Monsignor Valenzano said. "It was good to see Catholics and Protestants taking time to give thanks to God. They don't forget."

Harbaugh spoke with Monsignor Valenzano about visiting the basilica for the recent funeral of Patricia Modell, wife of former majority owner Art Modell.

"He commented on how beautiful the basilica is," Monsignor Valenzano said.

In his homily, the priest spoke about God's call of Samuel - indirectly playing on the Ravens' defensive catch phrase, "relentless."

"God is relentless in calling us from darkness to light and from sin to forgiveness," Monsignor Valenzano said.

The Ravens gave Monsignor Valenzano two tickets to the big game in appreciation

for celebrating Mass. He sat in the front row of Section 512 of M&T Bank Stadium and was joined by his friend, Monsignor Thomas Tewes, retired pastor of Our Lady of Hope in Dundalk.

“It was cold,” Monsignor Valenzano said, “but we were blessed to be in the sun.”

The priest noted that he now has a 2-0 record celebrating Mass for Baltimore football teams. He last celebrated a Mass 30 years ago before a game in which the Colts beat the Patriots.

“I didn’t want to lose,” Monsignor Valenzano said with a laugh.