

Orioles strike out with Good Friday opener

In the Peanuts comic strip, Charlie Brown once noted, “A hot dog always tastes better with a ball game in front of it.”

Opening Day of the baseball season is always special. The grass is green, the park feels fresh; hope springs eternal for every team.

The problem this year in Baltimore is that the Orioles have scheduled Opening Day for April 6, which is Good Friday. Even worse, first pitch is at 3:05 p.m., the time when most Catholic parishes and many other Christian churches hold services to commemorate the Passion of Our Lord. The Jewish feast of Passover begins also at sundown April 6, so Jews who will be preparing for the holy days would likely be unable to attend the game.

I remember back when I was growing up, Mom and Dad didn’t allow us to watch television on Good Friday, unless perhaps to watch “The Robe” or “The Ten Commandments,” if they happened to be shown on one of the three networks. The thought of going to a movie or to a ballgame? Don’t even consider it.

Longtime Orioles fan John Dunlap sent a request to the Orioles to move the home opener from Friday to Thursday, April 5, as, he noted, the Cincinnati Reds eventually did. Heck, even Raul Castro’s government in Cuba acquiesced to Pope Benedict’s request that Good Friday be made a national holiday in the Communist country, at least for this year (see page 12).

The Orioles responded to Dunlap that April 6 at 3:05 p.m. is the 20th anniversary to the day and time of the opening of Camden Yards, and that opening day 2012 would not be changed.

“We regret any inconvenience this may cause some fans; however, we have to weigh many factors when determining start times of our games and believe this represents the best option,” Monica Barlow, director of public relations for the Orioles, told the Review in an email.

“I understand they’re a secular organization.” Dunlap told the Catholic Review. “I was asking as a fan. I want to go to the game. I want to enjoy a hot dog. I can’t do it if it’s on Good Friday.”

He said he’s disappointed that the team didn’t reconsider, given that the Catholic Church is a huge part of Baltimore’s history and that the region has a large Jewish population.

We’re not calling for a boycott of the team (we might even play hooky some afternoon and take our staff down to Camden Yards). We’re not even saying necessarily that just because a lot of people of faith might not go to on Good Friday, somber day that it is, that no ballgames should be played on that day. The NFL plays on Thanksgiving; the NBA plays on Christmas, and both get a lot of fans. Many ball teams - professional and college - will play through the Easter weekend, including on Good Friday or Easter itself. But opening day is different. For some folks, the first day of the regular season is almost as sacred as going to church.

Mark Boyer, a parish corporator at St. Michael Parish in Clear Spring, has been a season ticket holder since 1993 and attended every home opener since 1988. But he’ll miss the opener April 6, what would have been his 25th in a row.

“I’ll take my son and my mom down on Saturday for the second game,” he said.

The O's could have hit a home run with a change of date. Instead, it's a swing and a miss.