

# Bishop Hicks' Column

March 2024

## SUPER BOWL SURPRISE



ON A SUNDAY IN FEBRUARY, I gathered with my family and friends to watch the Super Bowl. It was entertaining hearing everyone's reasons for gathering around the game that day. Some were cheering on a particular team or player. Others couldn't

wait to view the halftime show or catch a glimpse of Taylor Swift. A few just relished being in the company of friends and family and indulging in the abundance of food and drink. Regardless of each person's motivation, the Super Bowl provided us with an opportunity to come together in the spirit of fun and camaraderie.

I enjoyed the gathering and the game for all those reasons, but I must admit many of the commercials left me confused! I found myself asking, "What was that commercial about?" or, "What product were they trying to sell? I just don't get it!" Thankfully, there were plenty of younger people around to explain curious ads to me.

Then, to my surprise, a 30-second commercial popped up featuring the actors Mark Wahlberg and Jonathan Roumie. I did a double-take and blurted out in surprise, "Wait a minute! Did they just actually run a positive, CATHOLIC commercial?!" I convinced my family and friends to rewind it and rewatch it with me three times. Amazingly, the commercial urged viewers to take a break from the game, thank God, and enjoy a moment of prayer on this Sunday. The ad highlighted a 40-day Lenten prayer challenge to be found on the Hallow app. The last three words in the commercial nudged us to "Stay prayed up." If you have not yet seen this commercial, you can find it on Hallow's YouTube channel ([hallow.com/youtube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqWz8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8)).

I'm already a subscriber to the Hallow app. But I immediately clicked to join the 40-day prayer challenge which began on Ash Wednesday. It seems I was not alone in heeding that call! The day after Ash Wednesday, the Hallow app reached the number-one spot in Apple's App Store. I'm liking this structured and intentional Lenten challenge; it has enhanced my further spiritual growth during this season of Lent.

Here's what's stirred me: the Pray40 Community Prayer Challenge offers a different, well-prepared meditation or reflection from a variety of presenters, including Mark Wahlberg, Jonathan Roumie, Sister Mary Bernice, M.C.; Sister Miriam James, S.O.L.T.; and Father Mike Schmitz. Many of the days guide us through the astonishing, spiritual classic, *He Leadeth Me*, written by Fr. Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. Fr. Walter was a Jesuit priest and missionary, imprisoned for more than 20 years in the Soviet Union. Amidst horrific and brutal conditions, Fr. Walter underwent a profound spiritual journey. He surrendered his life to God and gifted us with an extraordinary example of faith, humility, and hope in Christ.

I've noticed several testimonials about the positive, spiritual effects of using the Hallow app this Lent. One that was moving was from a man who shared "Hallow right now is bringing me back to my faith and I will see where it goes. I abandoned my Catholic upbringing because I struggle with religion being the root of so much division and war in our world. I've just recently introduced Hallow and am taking great comfort in welcoming God back into my life."

This Lent, I've been trying to spend less time on social media and more time in quiet and meditative prayer. So it seems like a paradox to me that Hallow's Lent Pray40 challenge is leading me back to my phone. Yet, using this particular app doesn't make me feel like I just wasted a large chunk of time—instead, it's guided me to feeling nourished, inspired, and blessed during my Lenten journey.

This Lent, I've noticed how many people are seeking to go deeper spiritually. So many yearn to return to God and the Church. The Church gives us so many beautiful paths to do so. Astoundingly, this year's Super Bowl commercial, which was broadcast to millions throughout the world, just might have been the voice of the Holy Spirit whispering with a megaphone to each one of us! We have been invited to draw closer to the Lord this Lent and become more fully the person God created us to be. So, here's my commercial: if you have not already done so, I encourage you to download the Hallow app and start following the Lent Pray40 challenge daily. It's never too late to stay prayed up!

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