

‘I lied, I stole, I pulled the cat’s tail’: Grandma’s lessons on confession

During this penitential season of Lent, it was refreshing to receive this vignette from my oldest brother, about our maternal grandmother and her experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, known in her day simply as “Penance” or “Confession.”

Granny Kohs told my brother this story once she found out he was studying German. Our ancestors had all come from Germany, at some point or another. Granny Kohs was second-generation American, but she still spoke German. As my brother notes, “Imagine it told with a twinkle in her eye and a small chuckle in her voice.” That’s the way I remember a lot of my conversations with Granny, who in her later years lived close enough to our home for me to ride my bike to her apartment.

“When we were little and we told my father that we had gone to confession at school today, he would ask ‘What did you tell the priest? I bet you told him:

“ ‘Ich habe geliegen,

“ ‘Ich habe gestohlen,

“ ‘Ich habe die Katz beim Schwanz gezogen.’

[Which has a sort of rhyme to it, in German, and essentially translates to “I lied, I stole, and I pulled the cat’s tail.”]

“ ‘No, we didn’t tell him that,’ I would say. But we would never tell my dad what we really told the priest because that was a secret, you know.”

And of course, Granny was right, what you tell the priest in confession is a secret. This Lent, as in past years, parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are offering many opportunities to take advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation during Lent. In addition to special penance services, the sacrament is available in every parish in the archdiocese Wednesday evenings, 7-8:30 p.m., Feb. 20-March 20.

As a special Web page for “The Light is On” campaign notes, “By participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, whether our first time in days, weeks, months or years, we are experiencing God’s individual and unwavering love for us and one of the true graces made available to us by our Catholic faith. God loves us just the way we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way.”

The site features plenty of resources for making a good confession, no matter how long it has been, and the archbalt.org site has maps and other searchable lists to find the parish nearest you.

Participating in the sacrament is confidential, and can provide great grace. Take some time today, or any other Wednesday in Lent, to participate in this sacrament and lay down your burdens before the Lord - even if you didn't lie, steal, or pull the cat's tail.