Temptation. All three readings pertain to temptation and its consequence. All of us here, except for the youngest children, have experienced temptation and its occasional consequences in sin.

In today’s homily, I want to speak about what temptation is, what temptation is not, and some practical means for dealing successfully with temptation.

You will be happy to know that I am a bit of an “expert” concerning temptation! I’ve been dealing with it for the last 68 years. The object of temptation changes depending on whether someone is 8 years old, 18, 48 and now 68. The object of temptation changes with age, but the process of temptation does not change. Also, over the last 40 years, I’ve heard tens of thousands of confessions of people with their struggles with temptations. Temptation is never easy for anybody.

**What temptation is.** Temptation is an “inducement” to sin, a suggestion, a seduction. It arises spontaneously: it is pre-conscious and pre-volitional, which means that it appears before we even think about it, and before we even desire it. For example, at the kitchen door where the priests live on campus, the cook keeps a bowl of chocolate M&M’s. Each time that I pass the door, I take one or two of these candies. For Lent, I’ve given up snacking between meals. Now when I pass that same kitchen door, those tiny little M&M’s appear to my eyes like orangesized chocolate candies! I don’t even have to time to think about, or to desire them, but out of the blue, they pop right into my line of vision! Temptations may arise instantaneously or gradually, with great intensity or slight teasing, pertaining to what would lead to mortal sins or venial sins. Also, “one man’s drink is another man’s poison”: what tempts one person might never tempt someone else. All of us, however, experience some kinds of temptation.

**What temptation is not.** Temptation is not a sin. Sin may or may not follow temptation, but for sin to transpire, the individual needs to reflect intellectually and desire willfully to assent to the temptation. In all of our lives, something is missing. We all have a “God-sized gap” that only God can fill. We, however, try to fill that gap with something that is not of God. ... Can you think of something that you use to try to fill that gap? ... It’s like trying to place a square peg into a round hole. It is trying to use something finite, limited, and earthy to satisfy a desire that is infinite, divine and limitless. Temptations to seek evil can never satisfy our longing for God.
Practical steps to deal with temptation. You and I could exchange a hundred recommendations, but I want to give four main helps.

First, pray as Jesus did, “Father, not my will but your will be done.” And as the Blessed Virgin Mary prayed, “I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your will.” The point is, if you want to confront temptation, please try to make your attitude/framework/starting point: doing “God’s will.”

Second, know yourself. Every person is unique. What are the likely areas of temptation for you? Some people can walk into a casino and not spend a dime. Other people might walk into a casino, and leave with only a dime!

Third, Alcoholics Anonymous is the most effective organization for providing self-help. AA teaches the acronym: HALT. When we are hungry, angry, lonely, tired, we are not our best selves and are more susceptible to temptation. Please when you are hungry, stop and get a bite to eat. When you are angry, step outside, cool off, and count to ten. When you feel lonely, pray because the Holy Spirit always dwells within you, or call a friend. And if you are tired, take a nap. In addition to the acronym HALT, I’d like to add a fifth context: boredom. As the Sisters taught me in grade school, “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.”

Fourth and final for today, is this advice: “Live life more moderately, and I’ll bet that many of your temptations and consequent sins will evaporate!” This advice applies especially to women more than to most of us men. I find the women generally are “so good” that they risk being “too good.” If someone needs help, they rush to help. If a neighbor dies, the local women bring over a cooked dinner for the surviving family members. If the pastor calls and says he urgently needs a Religious Education teacher, the women might stretch themselves and say yes. If a child or husband is sick, the mother goes out of her way to nurse. In this process of stretching and stressing themselves, many women and some men forego living life in moderation, and instead live “at the edge.” And when “one more thing” is asked of them, “they’ve had it!” Everybody, please do yourself a favor, and try to live life more moderately.

In conclusion, God creates each person as good, but with an inclination to evil. So I urge you, know what temptation is, what temptation is not, and know some practical steps that you might take to respond in a positively holy way to your inevitable temptations.