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**The Virgin with Host (1854)**  
 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867)  
 Oil on canvas (tondo), diameter : 113 cm (44.5")

*The Virgin with Host is a circular painting in the style of Renaissance Tondi (circular work of art). She is recollected before the host of her Son's flesh. "The Holy Virgin, holding her beautiful hands joined together by the tips of her long fingers, with her eyes adores . . . the host, a white sun shining atop the chalice where, in unplumbed mystery, the son she just now held in her arms is incarnate; the Madonna's head is divine in its sweetness. Her pure features, of a Christianized Greek type, bear an incomparable nobility that is Mr. Ingres's special preserve," wrote the poet and novelist Théophile Gautier. This nineteenth-century comment exemplifies the devotion of its time, which is expressed in holy images celebrating both the Mother of God and the beauty of woman. Beyond this, however, the fervor of a great Marian century shines through, a piety nourished by many apparitions: in 1830 to Catherine Labouré in the rue du Bac in Paris; in 1846 to the two young shepherds at La Salette. The year that Ingres completed his painting, Pope Pius IX pronounced the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Mary was soon to appear at Lourdes (1858)*

**I**n the realm of the flesh, hunger signals the need for sustenance. In the spiritual realm, hunger is the desire for God, the very sustenance of our existence. St. Augustine called this hunger the "restlessness" of our hearts, the desire to know Him in whose image we are created. These words, "He has filled the hungry with good things," assure us that the deepest longings of our hearts, our spiritual longings, which only God can satisfy, do not end in frustration. Jesus himself proclaimed, in his Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied" (Matthew 5: 6).

Certain traditions in Catholic spirituality seem to argue that the hunger of desire is, at best, dangerous. Our disordered desires may lead us to lesser goods, or even into sin. It would seem that the holy Virgin of Virgins should

prefer to be left empty, hungry, and unfulfilled. However, his type of asceticism more closely approaches a Stoic or Buddhist sentiment than a Christian one. The enemy is not hunger but the disordered appetites. The true danger lies not in desire itself but in our capacity to desire creatures more than the Creator.

The desires for God, however, are the wings of the soul. St. Augustine, the man who felt it was inappropriate for him to weep at his mother's funeral, says, "The whole of the Christian life is a holy desire." St. Katherine Drexel once remarked, "I looked up in wonder at God's wonderful ways and thought how little we imagine what may be the result of listening and acting on a desire God puts into the heart. . . . Yes, nourish before him great desires."

Left page:  
**The Visitation**  
 Frédéric Montenard (1849-1926)  
 Fresco  
 Saint-François-de-Sales Church, Paris, France

*The realism and simplicity of this Visitation scene invite the viewer to live out, if only in spirit, this sacred moment in its actual conditions. The landscape, buildings, and costumes evoke the Mediterranean world. Frédéric Montenard, who was born into an old Provençal family, was in the habit of placing Southern French landscapes in his large decorative compositions. Besides his landscapes and seascapes, he is also known for his panels in the Sainte-Beaume chapel in the Var (Southern France) that depicts the life of St. Mary Magdalene.*