

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed . . .

Toward the end of the 1979 film *Manhattan* (which revered film critic Roger Ebert included in his list of The Great Movies) Ike, a 42 year old ex-television writer played by Woody Allen reclines on his apartment couch with a hand held microphone, ready to record experiences in his life which were special, enduring. The reason is he is feeling lost; life has left him nowhere, its promise fading. He had been divorced twice, a feature of his friends' lives as well. They were all likeable people but did not seem to have any radical foundation to their existence, certainly not religion. One of the key Gershwin compositions supplying background to the film is *Rhapsody in Blue* – and blue in the sense of the blues seems the proper tone to what otherwise is a wonderful black and white imaging of Manhattan.

For a while he had been happy in a relationship with Tracy, a Dalton School senior played by Mariel Hemingway. Aside from the moral issue of the relationship, Tracy comes across as almost an archetypal youth, possessed of a simpler, trusting sense of things – more like a nymph or one of the graces out of Greek mythology and therefore not just the high school senior she portrays. But Ike had broken off with her, leaving her deeply hurt at a soda fountain. Only later, after other break ups, does he pause to ponder things that still matter to him.

Don't we all have moments when something out of the past surprises our memory with a flood of nostalgia or recovered feelings – as a minor or major turning point in our lives, be it only a sled named Rosebud? Ike asks himself why is life worth living.

Well, there are certain things I – I guess that make it worthwhile . . . like what? Uh, for me . . . (Sighing) oh, I would say . . . what, Groucho Marx, to name one thing . . . Willy Mays, and um, uh, the second movement of the Jupiter Symphony, and . . . Louie Armstrong's recording of "Potatohead Blues" . . . Sentimental Education by Flaubert . . . uh, Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra . . . ummm, those incredible apples and pears by Cezanne . . . (Sighing) uh, the crabs at Sam Wo's . . . uh (Sighing) Tracy's face . . .

Suddenly life has meaning. He's off and running down Second Avenue – arrives breathless at the lobby of Tracy's apartment building. She's surprised, thrown off balance. She is packed to leave that very moment to fly to London to attend an Acting School. He wants her to stay. He fears the competition of young actors. To the tune of Gershwin's *They're writing songs of love, but not for me* he thinks "six months"? *I mean, you-you'll change. You know, you'll be – you'll be . . . in six months you'll be a completely different person.*

And then Tracy says the final words of the film that made it a classic for me: *Look, six months isn't so long. Not everybody gets corrupted. Look, you have to have a little faith in people.*

Will Ike trust himself to the future? The look on his face seems to reflect the look of Woody Allen in so many of his movies. It seems to say I'd like to believe but I don't trust this world – I can't shake the skepticism it breeds. And because even we as Christians sometimes have our doubts about the meaning of life in so secular, politicized a world, should we not join the disciples in today's Gospel and ask Jesus to *Increase our faith?*