



# REFLECTIONS

February 19, 2017

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "**

*Matthew 5:3*

## Securely Found

"Tell me about yourself," I asked him after church one Sunday. The request of this homeless man seemed simple; and his response seemed so too. Only it wasn't. His head lowered shyly and his eyes looked toward his chest. "Lost," he said. The word described him well. It signaled disappointment, disbelief, despair, and truth. Lost meant more than being without a home or direction. It described a loss of meaningful purpose.

That day began a journey with him that would impact his life and enrich ours. We learned his story in bits and pieces over the years. From carefully selected words in conversation and letters written in prose, he described his early life as rooted in comfort afforded by his father's social status and extraordinary wealth. But he lived with his unwed mother, unsure if God even intended him to be. Still he fondly recalled the subway rides to Brooklyn's Ebbets Field to those few major-league baseball games his father took him to see. And he often recalled the home in Maine where he and his mother spent their summers. We observed his intellect and learned of his Vanderbilt degree. But none of his memories exceeded the love he expressed for his only child, Alexandra.

By vocation Philip Townsend had been a teacher. That part of his life was clear without being told. To anyone who would listen, he taught about things he found beautiful. About geography, he described the beauty in Morelia, Mexico where at Christmas time he dressed as Santa Claus and delivered stuffed animals to the children there. About poetry, his favorites were Robert Frost and Alfred Lord Tennyson. About music, he preferred Beethoven, Mozart, and Bernstein.

One afternoon I took him to a movie. On the screen, we watched the likes of Duke Snider, Gil Hodges, Pee Wee Reese, and Jackie Robinson rekindle those scenes in Ebbets Field from an era we each had cheered as young boys. As the movie ended, tears spilled down his cheeks. They were tears for a time of joy relived, I think.

Joy filled memories didn't restore the comforts of his youth. But as a welcomed member of our church, Sundays found him stationed at the church's front door greeting people and inviting passersby to come in too. Other days he gathered fellow residents of his assisted living home to hear the classics of Beethoven and Mozart and to read them poems by Frost and Tennyson. It was finally a home for him after years without one.

Then early one morning while it was still dark, God called Philip quietly home. It was Valentine's Day. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" He's there today, resting in the loving arms of Jesus. No longer lost.

Securely found.

*You are the light of the world,*

*Richard +*

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