

24<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## Nicknames

**“A nickname is the heaviest stone  
that the devil can throw at a man.”**

*William Hazlitt, Sketches and Essays.*

When I was writing about the “toast Communion” yesterday, I recalled a boy in our School who had the nickname, “Toastie Graham”. While most of us had a “piece” for lunch (a sandwich, for the uninitiated) Bobby Graham had toast. He *always* had toast. I have no idea why. But it was toast for him every day, and the nickname “Toastie” just stuck. Other kids had nicknames too: Lanky and Titch because of physical attributes; Billy Whizz and Pele because of sporting ability. And teachers? We had The Boss, Wavy Davy, Lofty, Fossil, Geraldo, to name but a few.

Nicknames have always been common, and usually they contain no malice. But sometimes, when they are barbs of criticism, malevolent, full of nastiness, they can become Hazlitt’s “heavy stone”, thrown by the devils that are in us all, of cruelty and judgement.

Thomas Paine took another line when he wrote in *The Rights of Man*: “Titles are but nicknames, but every nickname is a title.” If we are to give people this nickname or that, let it be positive and not cruel, an affirmation and not a put-down. Let it be a title that *really* matters!

The early followers of Jesus were called “Christian” as a nickname, a heavy stone thrown by those who were threatened by their faith and actions. But it was a title they came to wear with pride, for it represented much more than the devil in anyone could destroy.

### **A prayer for today**

*God who is beyond our naming, you love us individually and write our names on the palm of your hand. Let us be respectful of one another’s names today; help us to build people up and not cast them down by the names we use; help us give everyone we know their unique title – as a Child of God. Amen*

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