

Integrity counts

IT was depressing to read about Jenny Thompson, who sold the newspapers her story about her affair with Wayne Rooney, the famous Manchester United and England footballer, during his wife's pregnancy.

Whenever someone in public life has an affair it usually makes the news. And then we hear the same old platitude that it doesn't matter how people behave in private as long as they do a good job in public. The public, which probably includes me and maybe you, will then spend an amazing amount of time devouring the stories, pondering later why we wasted valuable time reading such nonsense.

On the one hand we have this kiss and tell culture in the tabloid newspapers, while at the more sophisticated end of newspaper sensationalism are the autobiographies that

have recently flooded the market, especially those of well-known politicians such as the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. It would appear that to increase sales the biographer has to say something unkind about the character of a colleague, especially if that person is still alive.

Integrity is something that is not only important in the private lives of famous sportsmen, but also in the playing of the game. For example we have the recent allegations about individuals and members of a team being offered money to play in a certain manner that would bring lucrative rewards to those who bet on their style of play.

I wonder what God makes of it all. He is probably not surprised that people cheat on one another or that they sell each other's secrets. But my guess is

that he cares more about the details that people say don't matter. The God who declares in the psalm that "I require truth in the inner parts" is, I would imagine, more interested in how we treat one another than how good we are at our jobs. He probably cares less about a footballer's performance on the field than a hidden decision to be unfaithful, or the decision of a man or woman to sell his or her story at the expense of someone else. We may say none of this matters, but the fact is someone, somewhere, is getting hurt, being betrayed and, perhaps worst of all, betraying themselves.

It is this betrayal of self that bothers Jesus moments after Judas has delivered his own "kiss and tell". His reaction is not to worry for his own safety or reputation, or to have a go at his accuser

and offer a counter denial. Instead he looks at Judas with compassion and asks why someone he loved and who loved him could sell his soul so cheaply.

Jesus tells us that when we die and face God all of us will have to give an account, not just of the things we have done, but of the words that we have said and even the thoughts we have had. Jesus is very clear on the question of integrity when he says: "Let your yes be yes and your no be no". He also goes on to show us that God our judge will neither be fault finding nor seeking out gossip, as happens on the internationally known Big Brother reality show. Nor will he be a God as Bette Midler sings "watching us from a distance", but one who is alongside us in our daily lives, who loves us even when we sell ourselves, and others, short.