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Prayers for the Pope & the Repose of the Soul of Manuela Camagni

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Distinctly Catholic

Wednesday, one of the women who cares for the Pope, Manuela Camagni, was killed in an auto accident on her way home. She was, by all accounts, a remarkable woman and the tragedy has wounded the entire household. We should all pray for the repose of her soul but I think we should also say a special prayer for Pope Benedict.

Sister Death comes when she will, but in the normal course of affairs, she comes later in life. This allows the soul time to prepare to meet her, but that preparation is itself, for many people, a great source of anxiety. It is one thing to lose a friend or an acquaintance in a tragic accident, but as one gets on in years, every brush with death bears with it the intimation of your own time coming to an end. I see this in my Dad who seems to attend any and every funeral within a fifty mile radius of our home, even if he knew the deceased only very little. It is as if he wants to be as familiar as possible with Sister Death so as to be ready when she comes, and come she will. The Holy Father is only one year older than my Dad, so I am sure he has similar thoughts.

The other aspect of this tragedy, of course, is the light it sheds on the often unremarked fact of the Pope's living arrangement. People forget that for the first time in history, the Holy Father's personal "family," the women who cook and clean and spend time with him and watch movies and discuss books, these are not nuns. Pope Benedict XVI's "family" consists of women who belong to the *Memores Domini*, a part of *Communione e Liberazione*. These women have houses through Italy and some here in the States too. They live in community, and they live chastely and prayerfully, but they also are mostly professionals who hold down jobs in "the real world." Manuela was coming home, to the Vatican, from work. That is a sentence that could never be written before this pontificate really. I cannot guess at the impact this living

arrangement has on the Holy Father, but it is the case that if the Pope wants to speak with a professional lay woman on some topic, he only has to look across the dining room table. There was a time, not so long ago I might add, when prelates were acutely nervous when in the presence of professional women. I witnessed that with my own eyes on several occasions. But, Pope Benedict XVI, in this as in so many things, is a remarkable pope.

Today, that Pope's heart is heavy as he thinks of the death of his friend and thinks, too, of his own mortality. Say a prayer for him, and for the repose of the soul of Manuela Camagni.

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