

Nation

BENEDICT'S U.S. VISIT

Pope 'ashamed' of priest abuse

Blunt talk on pedophile scandal soothes some Catholics, leaves others wanting action

WASHINGTON — Pope Benedict XVI chose to address bluntly the sex scandal that has torn at the church even before he landed Tuesday on his first official visit to the U.S., saying he was "deeply ashamed" by the actions of pedophile priests.

His comments aboard his plane, in answer to a written question submitted by a reporter, appeared to soothe many Catholics but left others demanding more action.

"It's difficult for me to understand how it was possible that priests betrayed in this way their mission to give healing, to give the love of God to these children," the pope said, adding that the church would work to exclude pedophiles from the priesthood. The words were his strongest ever on the



The Associated Press

Trinity Duggan, 6, of Bowie, Md., waited to greet Pope Benedict XVI in Washington on Tuesday.

issue.

Mathew Schmalz, an associate professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross, a Jesuit institution in Worcester, Mass., said Benedict's remarks on the plane were significant because they re-

presented a change in tone.

But Tahira Khan Merritt, a Dallas attorney who represents plaintiffs in clergy sex-abuse cases, said, "I think it's interesting ... that this is the first time he's speaking about this."

She added, "I haven't heard anything in there about reparations to the victims, just about protecting the Church. ... All I'm seeing is legal maneuvering to get out of their moral obligations to these victims."

Ms. Merritt said she has represented more than 75 plaintiffs in clergy sex-abuse cases involving the Catholic dioceses of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and Amarillo.

Benedict said he will also raise immigration issues during his stay. He said he was especially concerned by what he called the grave problem of families that are separated by immigration policies and by border violence.

From staff and wire reports