

Graffiti mars pope's German birthplace, papal billboards in Malta

MARKTL AM INN, Germany - A spray-painted message discovered April 13 on the birthplace of Pope Benedict XVI in southern Germany was quickly painted over, police said.

A police spokesman in nearby Rosenheim confirmed the vandalism, which was discovered at dawn by a passerby, who informed police, the British news agency Reuters reported.

The graffiti was on the front door of the building, a former police station where Joseph Ratzinger was born in 1927, police said. Now a museum dedicated to the pope, the building is located in the predominantly Catholic region of Bavaria near the Austrian border.

Police spokesman Konrad Rutzinger said the message appeared to be connected to the abuse scandals within the Catholic Church. He declined to provide details of the graffiti's message.

Graffiti also was discovered on billboards promoting Pope Benedict's April 17-18 visit to the island nation of Malta, according to The Times of Malta.

The vandalism included what is known as "Pedobear," an image that has become a symbol in online communities to mock people showing a sexual interest in underage girls. Other vandals painted images of the pope with a Hitler mustache.

The bear image also showed up on the choir stand next to the stage being built for the April 18 papal Mass, the newspaper reported.