

History of the Crusades.
Episode 155.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
Prince Louis' Crusade.

Hello again. Last week we saw Simon de Montfort perform an astonishing political act when he managed to affect the outcome of Peter Benevento's Counsel at Montpellier in January 1215. Instead of the Council voting to reduce Simon's powers, it instead unanimously supported awarding the title of Count of Toulouse to Simon, an act which would see Simon assume control of most of Languedoc. The Papal Legate Peter Benevento decided he didn't have the legal authority to confer this title on Simon, so he hand-balled the matter to Pope Innocent III.

Now, Count Raymond VI had already traveled to Rome and was present in the city at the same time as the Council of Montpellier was taking place back in southern France. At some stage after February 1215, the Archbishop of Embrun arrived in Rome bearing news of the outcome of the Council of Montpellier, and Peter Benevento's letter asking the Pontiff to make a decision as to whether Simon de Montfort could be conferred the title of Count of Toulouse by the Church. With the current Count of Toulouse presenting himself in person in Rome and the wannabe Count of Toulouse out in the field, Pope Innocent needed to make a decision.

As usual, Pope Innocent took his time in doing so. It wasn't until the 2nd of April that he finally put pen to paper and wrote three letters, one to Peter Benevento, one to Simon de Montfort and one to the Lords who held land within the County of Toulouse. The letters were lengthy and differed slightly in their wording, but the gist of the three letters was the same: Simon de Montfort was to govern the County of Toulouse, not as its Count but as its custodian, until, you guessed it, the Ecumenical Council could meet and decide matters once and for all. Ah, the elusive Ecumenical Council. It has now been nearly two years since Pope Innocent had suggested calling an Ecumenical Council to fix everything, and Pope Innocent is finally making arrangements for the Council to meet, but no date has yet been set.

In his "Historia Albigensis" Peter the Monk sets out the contents of Pope Innocent's letter to Simon in full. Now I won't read out the whole letter as it's very lengthy, but I will read out the opening paragraph, which in itself is pretty long. So this is Pope Innocent's letter to Simon de Montfort of the 2nd of April 1215, and I quote "Bishop Innocent, servant of the servants of God, sends greetings and his apostolic blessing to his beloved son, Simon de Montfort. We commend that you be praised in the Lord's name, as is your due for fighting his battles in so praiseworthy a manner with unsullied devotion, a pure heart and tireless energy, as a true and valiant soldier of Christ, an invincible champion of the Catholic faith. Because of these achievements, the report of your righteousness and faith has spread over almost all the Earth. The blessings of many are continually heaped upon your head. The whole Church is united in prayer to intercede for you, so that a crown of righteousness will be reserved for you, to be delivered to you by the just judge hereafter, a crown which we believe is already laid up for you in heaven, as you have well deserved. So forward, Knight of Christ. Make full proof of your ministry. Run the race that has been ordained for you until you receive the prize. Faint not in your tribulations, in the knowledge that the Lord God Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts and leader of the army of Christ will be at your side to help you. Do not think to wipe away the sweat of battle until you have won the palm of victory. Rather, since you have started so well, see to it that this good beginning and the

subsequent progress you have so commendably worked to achieve, will lead on to the desired conclusion. Put your faith in patience and the perseverance which deservedly brings the crown of success, and remember that, in the words of the Apostle, no one is crowned except he strive lawfully." End quote.

Now, just let me read the last line of that paragraph again because the sting is in the tail. "No one is crowned except he strive lawfully." So what Pope Innocent has done here is to heap praise on Simon and tell him that fabulous things will be heading his way, so long as he acts lawfully. So basically he is warning Simon to stay on the leash, to only act within the boundaries of the instructions given to him by the Church.

And what are those instructions? Well, the letter goes on to declare that all the territory previously held by the Count of Toulouse shall be entrusted to Simon to govern until the Ecumenical Council meets to sort things out. The letter states, and I quote "It will be your task to preserve, guard, and defend these territories" end quote. The letter closes with a short paragraph telling Simon about the instructions Pope Innocent has given to Peter Benevento. It's only a short paragraph, so I think it's worth quoting in full. And I quote, "We are also instructing our Legate to take whatever measures he considers necessary for that business, meaning the business of peace, and to provide you with appropriate advice and assistance. He must take every care to ensure that his decisions are implemented, and if anyone should offer resistance or open rebellion, he must use whatever means he deems expedient to coerce them to comply with his wishes, allowing neither opposition to nor appeal against his decisions to stand in the way." End quote.

So in summary, what Pope Innocent has said to Simon is "You've done fabulous work on behalf of the Church, and your rewards will be great, so long as you act lawfully. You are to govern the County of Toulouse with a view to preserving the status quo, until the Ecumenical Council meets. Take notice of what Peter Benevento says. What he says goes."

Now, although the letter was signed by the Pope on the 2nd of April, Simon didn't get the letter until the beginning of May, and between the beginning of April and the beginning of May, quite a lot happened. The most significant thing to happen? Well, the Kingdom of France joined the Crusade against the Cathars.

Now, you might remember, way back in 1209 at the beginning of the Crusade, Pope Innocent tried to get King Philip to provide military support to the Crusaders, but King Philip said he couldn't as his realm was being threatened by King John of England and Emperor Otto of the Holy Roman Empire. Later in the conflict, Count Raymond of Toulouse, who was vassal to King Philip, tried to convince him to lend support to the rebels, but France had declined to become involved, save for a brief exception when Prince Louis looked set to embark on Crusade back in mid 1213, only to have his father pull the pin on the expedition, as King Philip had decided to invade England. Well, now, following the Battle of Bouvines, the King of England and the Holy Roman Empire are now no longer problems. King Philip has been able to take a deep breath and assess what has been happening across his Kingdom.

When he came to analyzing recent events in the south of France, the results may have made him sit up a little straighter on his throne, raise his eyebrows and blink a little. His vassal, Count Raymond, has recently been exiled from southern France by the Church, and it looks like the leader of the Crusade, Simon de Montfort, is governing the County of

Toulouse on behalf of the Church. Hmm. Time to send someone down there to check things out.

With Prince Louis jumping up and down with his hand in the air, saying "Pick me, pick me", it was easy for King Philip to make a decision. Prince Louis would gather some northern French noblemen, a contingent of knights, and some clerics, and head down to Languedoc, fulfilling his dream to go on Crusade. One of the clerics accompanying Prince Louis was Guy of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, the Bishop of Carcassonne, and Peter the Monk accompanied his uncle in his role as scribe. The mustering point for Prince Louis' Crusade was Lyons, and the Crusaders met there on Easter Sunday 1215, and the following day they left Lyons and marched south for Languedoc.

Now, does the Kingdom of France joining the Crusade have Simon de Montfort and Peter Benevento jumping up and down for joy? No, it doesn't. The politics of Languedoc, murky at the best of times, are at a critical juncture. The exiling of Count Raymond by the Church has resulted in a power vacuum. Simon de Montfort of course, is keen to jump in and fill this vacuum, while Pope Innocent wants to wait for the Church to decide the fate of Toulouse at the Ecumenical Council. For King Philip to now throw his hat into the ring and become actively involved in the politics of the region has made things even murkier, because at this stage, neither Simon de Montfort nor Peter Benevento know what King Philip's intentions are. Does he just want to let Prince Louis fulfill his dream to become a Crusader, burn a few heretics, then head back north, leaving Simon de Montfort and the Church to battle for the fate of southern France? Or does the recent victor of the Battle of Bouvines want to boot Rome out of the region, and either install his own Count of Toulouse or reinstall Count Raymond? No one knows. At least Simon de Montfort can rest slightly easy knowing that one of his most faithful bishops, Peter the Monk's Uncle Guy of Les Vaux-de-Cernay is in the expedition, no doubt taking every opportunity to regale Prince Louis with tales of Simon de Montfort's fabulousness, and how awesome he would be in the role of the Count of Toulouse.

All in all, this must have been a strange situation for Simon. A sizable army of volunteer Crusaders from northern France is heading to Languedoc, but none of them will be under Simon's command. Instead, they are under the command of a twenty-eight year old French Prince with no real knowledge of the politics of this volatile part of the world. The big question is, what is Prince Louis going to do with his army? And will he be more influenced by suggestions Simon did Montfort might make for his expedition, or will he be swayed by Peter Benevento?

Prince Louis met up with Simon de Montfort at Vienne. Peter the Monk states and I quote, "It is not easy to describe the enthusiasm with which they greeted each other when they met" end quote. I'm not sure whether Peter the Monk was the sarcastic type, but this sentence has been interpreted differently by modern historians. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption has Simon de Montfort being delighted to welcome Prince Louis and his Crusaders, as it would give him a chance to wrestle Toulouse and Narbonne back from the Church. According to Jonathan Sumption, Simon was miffed that the two great cities had submitted to the Church but not himself, and he was keen to convince Prince Louis to teach both cities a lesson. Laurence Marvin, however, in his book the Occitan War, interprets things differently, stating that Prince Louis' presence in the South could not have been entirely welcomed by Simon.

Regardless of Simon's feelings on the matter the two men met at Vienne, and after the meeting, Prince Louis found himself with a plan. He would punish the cities of Narbonne and Toulouse by destroying their defenses. This plan doesn't sound nearly as exciting as capturing and burning heretics, but at least the army of the French crown now has an idea about what they are going to do.

Now this is where things are about to get interesting, because Prince Louis now meets with Arnold Amaury. Now you will remember, of course, that Arnold Amaury has strong ties to Narbonne. Seemingly unfazed by the fact that the people of Narbonne dislike him, and have refused to let him into their city on previous occasions, Arnold Amaury is the Archbishop of Narbonne and believes himself to also be the Duke of Narbonne. According to Arnold Amaury's point of view, Narbonne is his city, and it is he and not Simon de Montfort or Prince Louis who should be deciding the city's fate. Arnold Amaury disagrees with the plan for the Prince's army to demolish Narbonne's defensive walls, so for the first time we see a split between Simon de Montfort and one of his most avid supporters, Arnold Amaury. According to Laurence Marvin in his book "The Occitan War", Arnold Amaury went so far as to urge Prince Louis to change his mind, and leave Narbonne alone. However, Prince Louis couldn't be swayed, and the northern French army continued its march southwards.

Having traveled down the Rhone valley, he next met up with the Papal Legate Peter Benevento in Valence. Now Peter Benevento is in a bit of a tight spot. Prince Louis is here on Crusade, not on a secular military campaign but a religious one. As Pope Innocent's representative on the ground, you would think that Prince Louis would be keen to follow orders from the Church. But once again Peter Benevento finds himself slamming up against the brick wall which is the persuasive character of Simon de Montfort. Simon has already met with Prince Louis and has convinced Prince Louis that the city of Narbonne and the city of Toulouse need punishing. But Prince Louis is now made aware that punishing Narbonne is contrary to the wishes of a Papal Legate and the Archbishop of Narbonne, Arnold Amaury. The cities of Narbonne and Toulouse are being held under the protection of the Papacy, and Peter Benevento wishes the status quo to be preserved. Destroying the ancient defenses of these important cities would be upsetting the status quo. Peter Benevento therefore sides with Arnold Amaury against Simon de Montfort. The Pope's representative, the Church's man on the ground, doesn't want the northern French army to harm either city.

So, heading his first Crusade, a military campaign in the service of the Church, does Prince Louis decide to follow the men of the Church or Simon de Montfort? He decides to follow Simon de Montfort. Really, Simon's powers of persuasion must have been something to behold. As Peter the Monk states about Simon, and I quote "Louis and those with him held him in the highest regard and followed his wishes and advices in all matters" end quote.

Prince Louise Crusade moved further south and arrived at Saint-Gilles in early May. It was at Saint-Gilles that Pope Innocent's letters of 2nd of April reached two of their recipients, Simon de Montfort and Peter Benevento. So Simon receives a word from Pope Innocent that he should act lawfully and respect the wishes of Peter Benevento. Does that sway him from his plan to use the Crusaders to punish Toulouse and Narbonne? No, it doesn't. With their plans un-altered by Pope Innocent's letters, the Crusaders moved into Languedoc, marching to Montpellier and then onto Beziers.

Beziers isn't very far from Narbonne, only twenty five kilometers or so. Having received word that the French Prince intended to punish their town, the citizens of Narbonne sent a delegation to Prince Louis to plead for mercy, and let the Prince know that the people of Narbonne were prepared to submit to his wishes.

Now, by this stage, Arnold Amaury is in a frothing lava of rage. Absolutely furious with his former buddy Simon de Montfort, his puppet Prince and the spineless Peter Benevento, he is not prepared to sit back, submissively like the rest of the citizens of Narbonne and let his city be damaged. The fact that the citizens of Narbonne don't like him, and the fact that no one but himself is of the view that the city is actually his, doesn't seem to matter, as Arnold Amaury tries to start a one-man war against Simon, the French Crown and the Church. Urging the people of Narbonne to take up arms against the Crusaders, Arnold Amaury does everything in his power to prevent the walls of the city being pulled down. But it was all to no avail.

Bowing before the force of Simon de Montfort's personality, at Beziers Peter Benevento issued a mandate to the effect that the Church would grant Prince Louis full authority to demolish the walls of Narbonne and Toulouse, on the condition that no residents of either city came to any harm. Prince Louis, now comforted that he had the support of the Church, ordered the citizens of Narbonne to demolish their own walls, under the supervision of two Crusader knights. He gave them three weeks to complete the task. While this tedious work was taking place, Prince Louis visited Carcassonne and was no doubt provided with appropriately lavish hospitality by Simon. Prince Louis decided to journey north to Toulouse before continuing back home to Paris.

While he passed a pleasant three weeks in Carcassonne, waiting for the people of Narbonne to complete destroying their own walls, Simon de Montfort sent his brother Guy to the city of Toulouse to let the Toulousans know of the plan. I'll let Peter the Monk, tell you what happened, and I quote "I must also record that before the Legate and Louis left Carcassonne, the Count sent his brother Guy with some knights to take possession of Toulouse in his name. When they reached the city, they occupied the fortified castle, which is known as the Chateau Narbonnais. They then took oaths of fealty from the citizens on the Count's behalf and ordered them to demolish the walls without delay. Though unhappy and unwilling to do so, the citizens agreed, and inspired by fear rather than any feelings of goodwill, set about the process of demolition. From this time forward, the pride of the city of Toulouse was utterly humbled." End quote. With his wall-destroying Crusade successfully completed and his forty days' Crusader service now expired, Prince Louis' Crusade came to an end, and he headed back home.

Now it's probably not going to surprise is anyone to discover that Pope Innocent was not pleased to find out about the wall destroying that took place during Prince Louis' Crusade. He was not pleased at all. But never mind, because the elusive Ecumenical Council is about to take place. Will Pope Innocent's Council solve all of Languedoc's problems? Tune in next week to find out. Until next week, bye for now.

End