INNOCENT III (1198-1216)

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:9-10
Prayer: The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi for Eternal Life
Hymn: 658 "This Is My Father's World"

Pope Innocent III was the ablest of the medieval popes. Of all the medieval popes, of all the popes he came the closest to carrying out and making a reality of the dreams and ideals of such popes as Nicholas I and Gregory VII and the Cluny reformers. For those who hold such dreams for the pope and the church the century of Innocent III --the Thirteenth Century-- was the most Christian of all centuries and the climax of the power of the pope and the church. The time of Innocent was the time when the church most completely dominated civilization and when the pope was the most powerful figure on earth. Under Innocent III the papacy reached the peak of its actual power.

The choice of Innocent III for pope:

The popes who followed Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) were too old and their reigns too short to carry out the program of Alexander III. But it was not just their age that made the difference. A reaction had set in against the worldly involvement of Pope Alexander III in his battle against Frederick Barbarossa. Cistercian ideals gained in influence--the pope should be a spiritual leader and avoid the struggle for wealth and temporal power. Saladin's capture of Jerusalem in 1187 brought a reaction that the papacy was misguided to waste its strength in wars with the Germans while infidel Turks occupied the holy places of Christ. A "peace" party arose among the cardinals that insisted that the papacy should concentrate on reform. Pope Lucius III (1181-85) was a man of peace--many thought he was too conciliatory toward the emperor. Urban III (1185-87) was a fiery pope who renewed the battle with the empire. Gregory VIII (1187) launched a program of serious moral reform. Clement III (1187-91) was the most money-hungry of the popes before the Renaissance and bribery and corruption flourished. When he died no one wanted the papacy--to prevent a schism the cardinals prevailed on Hyacinth, the oldest of the cardinals, to accept the papacy as Pope Celestine III (1191-98). He was already eighty-five years old and had been a cardinal for forty-seven years. He was a man of high reputation--pacific, incorruptible, scholarly. Above everything he feared materialism in the church. He felt the war with the emperor only encouraged materialism. Under his reign the emperor, Henry VI, consolidated his hold on Germany and Southern Italy and Sicily and encroached on papal territories in central Italy. At his death the military party among the cardinals gained the upper hand and rejected Celestine's choice for his successor, John Colonna, and chose instead the youngest of the cardinals, Lothar of Segni, who became Pope Innocent III.

The program of Innocent III:

Innocent was a member of a noble Roman family--a born aristocrat by temperament a politician, a statesman, a lawyer, a diplomat. He had been made a cardinal by his uncle, Pope Clement III, in 1190. Pope Celestine III had given him the cold shoulder. Innocent was well educated, having studied in Rome, Paris, and Bologna--he was well trained in law at Bologna and his law training best suited his abilities. Two works written while a cardinal, On Contempt for the World and On the Sacred Mystery of the Altar, showed him a safely orthodox but mediocre theologian. He was a leader with great ambition and drive and his concern for reform was real. He was dedicated to the exaltation of the Roman church and the fullness of the power of the pope (plenitudo potestatis). He found his program in Augustine's City of God and his models were Gregory I and Gregory VII. His mission was fourfold: 1) to rule the papal estates efficiently, 2) to organize society around the policies of the Roman church and to bring all governments under the guidance of the Holy Roman See, 3) to stamp out heresy, and 4) to advance Christianity against the Moslem infidels. Innocent III set forth his program during his opening year
in his papal bull, "The Moon and the Sun", of October 1198. Here is found his favorite figure picturing the relation of pope and emperor: the pontifical authority is represented by the sun and the royal power is represented by the moon.

**INNOCENT ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS POPE:**

Innocent faced stiff opposition at the beginning even in Rome. His critics felt he was hardly old enough to be a bishop much less pope. It took him ten years to master the Roman nobles and to gain control of the office of senator who ruled the city as representative of the people. Innocent carefully cultivated the people with gifts. Twice in 1203 and 1204 he was driven from Rome before he made himself master of Central Italy. He carefully built up the power and prestige of the papacy by encouraging people to bring their problems and suits to the pope. This required enlarging the papal curia to handle the vast amount of legal and administrative work. He fortified the papal estates and carefully cultivated alliances to support his position. He gave Central Italy as a fief to the marquis Azzo I of Este, who had the military might to guarantee stability. Innocent III took over the government of Southern Italy and Sicily as guardian of the young son of Henry VI, Frederick II, who was only three years old. By 1208 Innocent III had made himself master of Italy.

**INNOCENT AND THE TEMPORAL POWERS:**

**GERMAN AFFAIRS:** Innocent was politician enough to make the most of the divided condition of Germany. Philip of Swabia and Otto IV of Brunswick both claimed the throne of Henry VI. Innocent assumed the right of deciding between the two. Innocent set forth his claims in the decretal "Venerabili" of March 1202. Skillfully he delayed his choice to gain from each the largest possible concessions and promises. Finally he decided for Otto who had made the greatest promises to the pope. In the war that followed Philip won, but just when things look dark for the pope and Otto, Philip was assassinated by a personal enemy. Innocent crowned Otto in 1209. When Otto broke his promises to the Pope, Innocent turned to the sixteen year old Frederick II and declared him king of the Germans and emperor. Frederick dutifully served his benefactor. Otto was deposed and excommunicated.

**INNOCENT AND FRANCE:** Philip Augustus of France helped Innocent against Otto of the Germans and King John of England but his personal life became a problem. Philip Augustus divorced his wife, the Danish princess, Ingeborg, and had married his mistress, Agnes. He had secured the blessings of the French clergy. Ingeborg appealed to the pope. Innocent ordered Philip to get rid of Agnes and to take back Ingeborg. When Philip ignored the pope, Innocent called for a synod to try Philip and called for a crusade against him. Philip yielded to the pope and took back Ingeborg.

**INNOCENT AND SPAIN:**

Innocent forced King Alfonso IX of Leon to separate from his wife who was too closely related to him for marriage.

Innocent also annulled the marriage of King Peter of Aragon who had married a cousin and forced him to grant that his kingdom was a fief from the Pope.

**INNOCENT AND KING JOHN OF ENGLAND:** In 1206 there was a disputed election to the Archdiocese of Canterbury. The antiroyal party appealed to the pope and Innocent declared Stephen Langton to be Archbishop. King John exiled the clergy loyal to the pope. In 1209 Innocent excommunicated King John and placed England under the ban. He called on Philip Augustus of France for a crusade against England. In 1203 John capitulated on all points—he accepted Stephen Langton as archbishop, restored the confiscations, and recognized that England and Ireland were a fief from the pope and promised to pay an annual feudal tax. When the barons extracted from King John the Magna Carta, Innocent denounced their action.
and pronounced the Magna Carta null and void as an injustice to his vassal.

INNOCENT AND OTHER COUNTRIES: He intervened in affairs in Hungary, Bulgaria and Serbia and turned them from Constantinople to Rome.

INNOCENT AND THE CRUSADES:

THE FOURTH CRUSADE: Innocent appealed to the kings of Europe for a crusade but it was the knights rather than the kings who responded. The Venetians proposed to transport the crusaders by sea. The crusaders contracted with Henry Dandolo of Venice for the fleet but did not raise enough money or men. The Venetians offered to transport them in return for a favor—the Crusaders were to destroy Zara, on the Dalmatian coast and rival of Venice, for Mediterranean trade. The crusaders destroyed Zara. Innocent III furiously denounced them for attacking a Christian city.

The Byzantine emperor, Isaac II, had been dethroned and blinded by his brother, Alexius III in 1195. Isaac's son, also called Alexius, appealed to the crusaders to restore his father to the throne in Constantinople. Innocent forbade the crusaders to attack the Christian city but in 1203 they took Constantinople. Isaac and Alexius were slow to pay and before the year was out a rebellion in Constantinople put Alexius V, son-in-law of Alexius III, on the throne. The Venetians drove a shrewd bargain with the crusaders to take Constantinople a second time to restore unity to the church and to divide the booty. The crusaders took and pillaged Constantinople in 1204. Innocent made the best of the situation by establishing a Latin patriarchate and Latin empire.

THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE: In 1212 a shepherd boy, Stephen, in France, and a German boy, Nicholas, in Cologne, gathered thousands of children for a crusade. The children suffered greatly and were exploited on their way to Italy. The Italians sold them into slavery.

INNOCENT AND THE INQUISITION AGAINST THE HERETICS: Innocent recognized that the heretics, Albigenses and Waldenses, were growing despite the Inquisition. He organized the Order of the Holy Trinity or "Poor Catholics" to compete with the heretics. When his legate, Peter of Castelnau was murdered by the Albigenses he blamed Count Raymond of Toulouse and called for a crusade against the Albigenses. He declared that heresy was treason against God which was more serious than treason against the king. It was the beginning of twenty years of bloody inquisition led first by Simon of Montfort and then by Philip Augustus. The Inquisition turned into a greedy struggle for power and territory.

INNOCENT AND THE CENTRALIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN A PAPAL MONARCHY:

Innocent as a trained lawyer used canon law as an instrument to centralize power in the papal monarchy. He claimed for the papacy the right of decision in all disputed matters in the church—including disputed episcopal elections. He greatly enlarged the bureaucracy of the church to handle business that came to Rome. He claimed the right to examine all candidates for appointment to church offices. He claimed the right to transfer clergy from one see to another. He rewarded his legates with appointments to vacant sees. He brought all the wealth of the church under the power of the pope. He was the first to levy taxes on the clergy and the churches. The papacy reached the summit of its power under Innocent.

INNOCENT AND NEW ORDERS:

The Dominicans: Innocent refused Dominic an independent order and recommended that he lead his followers into an established order. Dominic and his men worked in the Augustinian order. Pope Honorius III finally gave the Dominicans recognition in 1216.

The Franciscans: Innocent III told of a dream of the church as a leaning tower upheld by one pale grey monk. He reluctantly gave recognition to Francis of Assisi and his followers.
THE FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL OF 1215: The summit of Innocent's reign.

Four hundred twelve bishops, eight hundred abbots and priors, and a multitude of clergy and secular princes confirmed the acts and policies of Innocent. The council confirmed the deposition of Otto IV and Raymond of Tyulose and pronounced in favor of Frederick II and Simon of Montfort.

It condemned the English rebels against King John.

It ratified the confiscation of the property of all heretics, and the deposition of all princes who did not cooperate with the church in its battle against heresy.

It condemned the heretics: Albigenses, Waldenses, and ideas of Joachim of Floris.

It ruled against the Jews: Jews existed only on sufferance of the church, had to wear distinctive dress, had to keep off the streets on festival days, and were denied the right to hold public office.

It declared the church's independence of the state.

The clergy were exempt from trial and taxation by lay authority.

The clergy were forbidden to engage in trial by battle or ordeal.

The pope had the exclusive right to tax the church.

The council approved the doctrine of Transubstantiation as the dogma of the church.

The council required every Christian to confess his sins at least once a year to the parish priest, to perform the penance assigned, and to partake of the Eucharist at least once a year, preferably at Easter.

The council called for a new crusade.

EVALUATION OF INNOCENT III: Under him the church reached the summit of its power. Because of lack of finances and inadequate administrative machinery he could not fully realize his dreams. His successors could not equal him and criticisms of church and clergy grew. The problem of whether the Church should be a community of the faithful or a papal monarchy with its hierarchy remained.