News of Edessa's fate trickled into Rome in the summer of 1145. Pope Eugenius III had just been elected when Bishop Hugh of Jabala brought him word of the disaster. Other delegations arrived over the summer. It was not until late fall, however, that Eugenius finally issued a crusading bull: Quantum predecessors, addressed to Louis VII and the Gauls, on 1 December 1145.

Louis' reaction was interesting. He had quarreled with the papacy over the appointment of bishops and other matters, but had recently been reconciled. He had perpetrated a massacre at Vitry in which a number of people had been burned to death in a cathedral, and he was looking for an appropriate penance. He knew of the fall of Edessa and the call for help, though he probably did not know of the papal bull. All of these factors made him sympathetic to a crusade, but they did not mean he was going to drop everything and gallop to the rescue.

The situation changed at Christmas, when the royal French court assembled at Bourges. There was still no universal enthusiasm for a crusade, for no one had forgotten the catastrophes of 1101. But the king spoke in favor of it, and support spread slowly through the winter. Even at Christmas, though, Louis made no reference to the crusading bull, which is why we don't think he yet knew of it.

In the spring of 1146, the king held a council at Vezelay in Burgundy, where St. Bernard was to preach. Bernard, now an old man, had enormous prestige by this time, was obviously frail, and yet there he was, called by God, giving a rousing sermon. Louis knelt before the holy abbot and received his benediction. Hundreds of knights followed his example. Old enemies reconciled on the spot and joined the sacred endeavor. Bernard tore up his own cloak for cloth for crosses.

The whole event was wildly emotional. Nothing like this had happened before. Urban had spoken only to a common assemblage, and the response of the nobility had come in the months following, but here we had the high nobility of France taking the cross on the spot. No king had ever led a crusade, which added to the excitement and lustre of the undertaking. The sermon had been an event at a royal council, with all the major nobility in attendance.

Even though the pope had enjoined only fighting men to go, many ladies at the court determined to travel upon the pilgrimage as well. Eleanor and some of her entourage appeared before the barons dressed as Amazons, declaring their willingness to fight for Christ. (So says a legend that is at least not completely out of the realm of possibility.) The story of the Amazons was a popular one among the troubadors, and Eleanor came from Aquitaine, where the troubador tradition was strong.

So, as the First Crusade had its genesis at Clermont, the Second truly began at Vezelay. Louis wrote to Emperor Manuel, King Conrad of Germany, Geza of Hungary, and Roger of Sicily, to ensure help and cooperation, mindful of the misfortunes of the First Crusade. They had to have been thinking; this time we'll do it better. We're kings!