

Is it 10:30 or is it 11:30? It all depends on whether we set our clocks back one hour or not. If you forgot to set your clocks back an hour, are you living in the future while the rest of us are living in the present? And if you set your clocks back an hour before 2:00 this morning, you were living in the past that whole time, weren't you? Past, present, future. Are we able to control time just by moving our clocks forward or backward?

It's more like time controls us. At least it does while we live here in time. But when we die, when our time comes, clocks no longer matter, for time ceases, it comes to an end.

And so, I ask you – the saints who have gone before us, are they past, present, or future? Since time is no more for them, how should we speak of them?

We usually speak of them as being in the past. “He worked hard for the church at one time.” “She was a faithful Christian back when she was alive.” “He did this...she did that...but that was then. They were with us for a while, but not anymore.”

What, did they fall off the wagon somewhere along the way? “We're still in the wagon, but they are all back there somewhere. They're no longer with us.”

Why is it that we speak of the saints who have died using language in the past tense? Our text does not do this. Here in Revelation 7, the Apostle John speaks of the dead in Christ using present tense language: “*After this I looked,*” he says, “*and behold a great multitude...standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb!'*” These saints are not past, nor are they future. They are in the present. John uses the present tense with them.

This does not mean that they did not have a past. Every saint has a past. You cannot be a saint without one. In our text we hear of the past of these saints: “*These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.*” Saints have a troubled past. They do not go looking for trouble. Trouble finds them because they are saints. “*Blessed are you,*” says Jesus, “*when others revile you and persecute you...on My account.*” Trouble finds God's saints because of Jesus. Because you belong to Jesus in your baptism, you have, and will have, a troubled past. Even if you are not persecuted, trouble finds you. And it's because of your sinfulness.

Saints are sinners. You cannot be a saint unless you are a sinner. But because you are a saint, because you belong to Jesus, your sins trouble you. The sins in your past, and in my past, are troublesome. They bother us. They even haunt us. How easy it is to think in this way: “How can I be a saint with all those sins in my past? Saints are holy, and I sure ain't holy. Not even close!”

But look at our text and hear more of the past of these saints. “*They have washed their robes,*” it says, “*and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*” God's saints have troubling sins in their past, but they also have, with those past sins, the blood of the Lamb. Every sin in your past is

covered by Jesus' blood. And His blood, shed upon the cross, is more than enough to wash away every sin in your past.

Saints are given a white robe in their baptism. It's the white robe of Jesus' blood. And no movement of the clock can ever affect that white robe. John sees the saints standing before the Lamb wearing their white robes in the present. No one could take their white robes from them.

And no one can take it from you. Not even the sins of your past. They are all forgiven. Yes, all your sins are forgiven. Jesus' blood washes them all away. You are, right now in the present, God's holy one, His saint, because you are covered with Jesus' blood in your baptism. God, therefore, declares you to be holy, His precious, forgiven saint.

And this means that you have a future, a glorious future. John in our text speaks of the future of the saints: "*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb...will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*"

This is the future for all of God's saints. It is your future, and the sins of your past cannot rob you of this future because Jesus is past, present, and future. "*Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever,*" cries the writer of the Book of Hebrews. You had a Savior, you have one now, and you will always have one. And He is your future, just as He was your past, and is here and now with you in the present.

And where Jesus is, there are His saints. We can speak of God's saints in the past. But open your eyes and see them here in the present. With eyes of faith, see them surrounding the throne of God's altar as you gather with them at the Lord's Table. Hear them, with ears of faith, singing with you as you sing the Sanctus: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth!" These saints who have gone before you, join with you at the Holy Supper of the Lord because, here in the Sacrament, Jesus joins together His saints in heaven with His saints on earth. Here at the Table of the Lord we can truly say that heaven and earth meet.

Here on earth we still have tears, but not in heaven, for "God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of His saints." All except, perhaps, for the tears of joy. For that glorious Day when Jesus comes to bring all His saints into heaven, your tears of sorrow will be at an end. But will you not have tears of joy as you embrace your loved ones and as Jesus embraces you?

And maybe even now as you come forward to the Table of the Lord, you may have some of those joyful tears. And why not? For even here and now you can embrace your loved ones who have gone before you. They are all here. They are not dead in the past. They are living now in the present, for they are with Christ. And He who embraced them in death, embraces you here in His Sacrament, bringing your loved ones here with Him. And because you, too, are His saint, you cry with them: "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*" Amen, Amen, and Amen!