

our glory hereafter. This is what is understood by merit. Now mortal sin destroys at one blow all the merits of a whole life. No matter how many years a man may have spent in virtue and in holiness, no matter what heights of Christian perfection he may have reached; he may have had the spirit of prayer like St. Teresa, the spirit of mortification and poverty like St. Benedict Labre, the burning zeal of St. Francis Xavier, the ardent charity of St. Vincent de Paul, he may have spent years in the exercise of all those various virtues and may have spread around him in his journey through time the blessings that ever well forth from a saintly life, and the sweet fragrance, the good odour of Christ unto salvation; one sin unto death cancels all his merits as by a stroke of lightning and blots them out from the book of God's remembrance. This soul is now robbed and despoiled of all those inestimable, priceless treasures, and is wrecked and ruined beyond the power of words to describe, it is like a vine fruit-laden, utterly destroyed by a fierce storm; like some once glorious cathedral suddenly overthrown and in ruins; like a great ship sunk in the sea with all its treasures. It is indeed, in the language of inspiration, "wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked." (Apoc. iii c. 17 v.) Of such a soul it may well be said:—"how is the gold become dim, the finest colour is changed, the stones of the sanctuary are scattered; the noble sons of Sion and they that were clothed with the best gold; how are they esteemed as earthen vessels, the work of the potter's hands." (Lamen iv c. 2 v.) 3

Now the sacrament of penance not only restores to the penitent sinner the life of grace he had lost, but it renews and restores all his merits, of which sin had deprived him. In the sacrament of his compassion the good Samaritan takes up the poor traveller that lay by the roadside, robbed and wounded and bleeding, and he cares for him and binds up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine; and heals him and gives him back all the rich savings of his well-spent years. In the words of the prophet he restores to him "the years which the