In this well-known story, Jesus heals a man who has been blind from birth. It is one of those particular healing miracles performed by Jesus, which are welcomed by some and opposed by others. St. John refers to them as signs, offered to inspire faith.

It’s difficult to understand why the religious officials, the Pharisees, would be critical of this healing. But they say, “this man (meaning Jesus) cannot be from God because he does not keep the Sabbath”. To them, any sign would include faithfulness to orthodoxy.

The Pharisees had earlier been offended when Jesus healed a man’s crippled arm on the Sabbath. But Jesus tells them if it’s legal to rescue your donkey from a ditch on the Sabbath, why is it wrong to relieve a human person of his suffering?

Of course they have no answer to that question. It is as though they want to use the Sabbath as an excuse not to see the great signs from God that Jesus is showing them. But some do admit, “if this man is a sinner, how can he perform signs like these”.

You see what is happening. Some of the Pharisees are having their eyes opened, together with this man born blind. And others remain unable to see God’s presence among them. In John’s Gospel, the Pharisees often symbolize the entire human race, even to this day.

There are those, both then and now, who hear of Jesus healing miracles in the scriptures and believe because of them, and there are just as many, both then and now, who reject them as fiction, or try to explain them in some natural way.

But as Christian, we are miracle people. Our lives are touched by miracles, even when we fail to see them. Here again, this passage contains important symbolism. The blind man, like the scribes and Pharisees, also represents us in many ways.

At times we are unable to see God’s kingdom surrounding us. We fail to acknowledge the miracle of life for what it is. We don’t always appreciate the beauty of the world all around us. And so we too are like the blind man.

There is so much we cannot see, even though it is right there in front of us. Some of us have been blind since birth, and some have lost our sight along the way, our ability to see God’s hand upon creation. We have become blind to the world around us.

We are all waiting, in our own way, to have our eyes opened by the Lord so we may see by the light of the spirit. Often, we’re unaware of what we lack. When we gain spiritual insight, it is as wondrous as someone born blind receiving physical eyesight.

The difference is that great. Without the light of the spirit, even though our eyes can see, we grope our way through life, we become easily lost, and we live our lives in moral darkness. Jesus came to heal us of our spiritual blindness, if we will allow him.
In the time of Jesus, most of the people believed that disease and disability, including blindness, was caused by sin. Jesus’ own disciples ask if the man is blind because of his personal sin, or that of his family.

And still today, we make the same error. When illness or tragedy strikes our family, we sometimes ask if God is punishing us for something we have done, in other words, for our sins. But this is not God’s way, to hand us personal tragedies for our mistakes.

The same is true of natural disasters, when many people suffer and die. They ask if this is God’s hand punishing them as a people. And while it is easy to say no, this is not God’s punishment, it is more difficult to explain why God saves some and not others.

We live with many questions in this world. We have more questions than we do answers. God does not strike us in anger. However, our sins do blind and cripple us spiritually. And that really is the point of today’s gospel.

To see clearly the miracle world we live in, we must leave our sins behind us. And our sins are anything that tends to separate us from God’s love and presence in our lives; the barriers we create; perhaps just our indifference. Sin, literally, means withoutness.

We regain sight through the grace of God, and by our cooperation with that grace. St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians calls us to this new life in Christ. He says, “once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord, you are light. Live as children of light, for the fruit of that light is found in all that is good, and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Sleeper awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” I love passages so clear you don’t have to explain them. You just have to give them a second reading. Sleeper awake. We just have to open our eyes to see the light of day.

Perhaps we are not blind after all, only asleep. But unless we wake up, we’ll never know for sure.