St. Simon and St. Jude

I have noticed in previous years that the feast of St. Simon and St. Jude (Oct 28th) often comes when we put the clocks back to mark the end of summer time and the beginning of winter. I wish we knew more about these two disciples of our Lord, but they remained close friends of Jesus and presumably stayed as faithful disciples and apostles. There has been much speculation as to where they were sent, but we don't know for certain. However, they have always been regarded as men who were sent by Jesus with a message to others in word or by act.

I am thinking about them today as ordinary men who did ordinary things for people which caused surprise. You will get the point of this if I tell you about something that happened to me some years ago.
At that time I was Rector of Bolton Percy, about ten miles from York, and Training Officer for the diocese of York. It also meant that I served on the Church of England Board of Education. This took me to London about every two months.

On this particular occasion, I had been at a Board meeting and caught the 4.30 London to York express. As we went through the stations getting out of London, the tea trolley came around. I went for a cup of tea but as I did so, I was confronted by the guard or conductor who asked me if I was a clergyman. My dog collar said it all, but I confirmed what the conductor or guard said. He was most polite and asked if I could come to the refreshment car where there was a lady in some distress. He had decided that she needed the help of a clergyman. I agreed, providing I could take my coat and briefcase with me. He took good care of me and my belongings and led me through a couple of carriages to the restaurant car. He then introduced me to the lady as 'a reverend' who would be willing to help her. I had no idea what her problem was! She was a well- dressed and educated woman. She lived in France and was going to Newcastle to visit her sister who was dying in the RVI. The problem was that she had second thoughts about what she was doing.
She wanted to see her sister, but she couldn't face it alone.

"You will come with me, won't you?" she said, fixing me with tearful eyes. I told her I had to get off the train at York, which by this time was about 50 minutes away. She gripped my wrist, poured two whiskeys, and pleaded with me. I called the conductor and explained my dilemma. My car was in the railway car park in York, and I was expected home for high tea between 7 and 8 o'clock.  My wife would be really anxious if I didn't turn up. The conductor's reply was, "No problem!" He seemed to have no problem with anything at all.
"If you can go with this lady to Newcastle, I can phone everyone concerned to make it possible." I gave in and told her I would go with her. Pointing to the conductor and to me, she exclaimed, "You are saints!" The conductor laughed it off as a bit of a joke. I was very uneasy and probably showed it.

To cut the story short, the conductor rang my wife and told her of my predicament and that I wouldn't be home until about 9.30. He spoke to the station master in Newcastle, who provided a taxi and escort to the RVI, and assured me that I could be on the same train back to York at the company’s expense, if I got on with the job. The most difficult part of the whole story was passing the lady over to the ward sister, who was also declared a saint, along with the rest of us. Guard, or whatever he really was, taxi driver, the ticket collector at the barrier, the ward sister and just about everyone involved - we were all saints, though I'm bound to say I certainly didn't feel like one!

The point I want to make is that all the characters in the story were doing what they believed was right from a religious perspective. The divine command, the divine imperative, was to do this for our Lord, for whoever it was who needed help. The lady from France had a real grasp of sainthood - ordinary people doing down-to- earth things because they were responding to a human need, but also responding to the command of someone who gave His very life for the need of all men and women of every race, colour, creed, or religious understanding.

Saints are not figures in a stained glass window, or plaster figures in a church niche. They are ordinary people like you and me who, for one reason or another, get tangled in the web of life and find themselves invited to do a job or act in a way which deep down they know to be right. They are acutely aware of the difficulties this may involve, but they feel they must do what the Lord commands and do it with a good heart and resolve. Real people in these circumstances are always under pressure. The saint is under no illusions. The tasks are fraught with possible difficulties, but they are part of sainthood - of doing what we know our Lord wants and accepting the difficulties of obedience with a happy heart. "If you do this, you are my friend indeed and my heart goes out to you for your faithfulness.”