On 23 May Mons. Oscar Romero, martyr of the faith, voice of the voiceless, and CAFOD partner, was beatified.

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This is Clare’s report, published by the Tablet on 25 May. http://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/645/even-the-gangs-declared-a-truce-for-romero-s-beatification

Torrential rain on the eve of a holiday weekend may dampen our spirits in the UK, but in drought-stricken El Salvador, Friday’s downpour heralded an auspicious start to the biggest weekend in the country’s history.

At the airport and throughout the city huge billboards and posters welcomed countless visitors to the land of now-Blessed Oscar Romero. At dusk, tens of thousands processed along the Avenue separating San Salvador’s cathedral from the venue of Oscar Romero’s beatification at the Saviour of the World Square. As we prepared to celebrate the vigil Mass the heavens opened. Yet all around us the atmosphere was one of celebration and excitement as local clergy on the raised platform swayed while leading enthusiastically sung popular songs praising Romero to the rhythms of salsa: it gave a whole new meaning to the concept of “Latin Mass”. As Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez celebrated, torrents of water continued to rain down until 4am, when the crowds started to queue to find the best vantage points for the beatification.

After a suffocatingly hot week, the rains ushered in a Saturday fresh with a light breeze. I accompanied Bishop John Rawsthorne – who was representing the Bishops of England and Wales, CAFOD and the Romero Trust – to negotiate road blocks and police checks and we arrived shortly after dawn at a seminary where over 1,000 priests and 81 bishops and cardinals were robing. As we filed out into the midst of the crowds –
estimates range from 350,000 to 700,000 people – a deafening wall of applause, cheering and cries of “Viva Romero” went up and we were swept along by an army of volunteer stewards: the London Olympics seemed subdued by comparison.

The weather was to provide one more surprise: as the Pope’s Apostolic Letter praising the new Blessed was read out, there was a collective gasp as the bright sun appeared with a rainbow halo around it. An unusual climatic phenomenon, for the devout congregation it seemed like a message from heaven, as the crowds, government leaders, cardinals and bishops alike, craned their necks in wonder at this extraordinary sight.

Just as in South Africa, where it's impossible now to find anyone who was against Nelson Mandela, in El Salvador you would be hard pressed to find anyone with a bad word about Oscar Romero. The efficiency and organisation of the event, only two months after the beatification date was announced in March, confounded fears – and some cynical commentators - that there would be chaos on the day. Everything went like clockwork; the Government – led by former FMLN guerrilla leader, Salvador Sanchez - had invested its reputation and resources in making this a day to be proud of, even the gangs declared a truce for the duration of the festivities. Reports claimed that this was the largest gathering ever for a non-papal beatification ceremony. That it was held in the tiniest republic of the Americas, with no open space large enough for crowds of this magnitude was close to a miracle in itself.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator of Romero’s cause, called on all Salvadoreans to make Romero’s motto - Sentire Cum Ecclesia - their own. For a future of peace and justice they should “Sentire Cum Romero”. Amen to that.

(The altar for the beatification Mass, with Romero’s phrase “Think and feel with the Church”.)