

21st March 2022

Belligerence

*“Bella, horrida bella,
et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno.”*

**“I see wars, horrible wars,
and the Tiber flowing with much blood.”**

Virgil, Aeneid, book 1

My High School Latin teacher would be proud of me, as I rhyme off details of the Second Declension Neuter Latin word for war – *Bellum*. It runs:

*Bellum, Bellum, Bellum, Belli, Bello, Bello,
Bella, Bella, Bella, Bellorum, Bellis, Bellis.*

I could explain what the genitives, datives, ablatives and plurals mean, but that would miss the point. Because I simply want to suggest that when Virgil wrote *Bella, horrida bella* in the Aeneid, he knew about wars. Every generation since has been the same. War is on our TV screens right now. Wars are horrible. When blood flows in the Tiber or on the streets of Ukrainian cities, we should cry with Virgil, *Bella, horrida bella*.

This came to mind when I heard a news report from a BBC Moscow correspondent which touched on Vladimir Putin’s state of mind. The correspondent’s insight was based on what came out of Putin’s mouth. “His language is belligerent,” she said. Belligerent! Yes! I knew what she meant. War-like, from the Second Declension Neuter Latin word – *Bellum*, for War. In Putin’s case, belligerence in language and tone have, all too obviously, been translated into belligerence of action, and the Tibers of Ukraine flow with much blood as a result. But *all* belligerent language is a war-cry, from our relationships to the international stage. *Bella* and the language that inspires them will always be *horrida*.

My High School Latin teacher would be even more proud of me, for I’ve created my own Latin motto for today – taken from Isaiah 66:12:

Pax sicut flumen fluit.

“Peace is flowing like a river”. Let’s put our belligerence aside – everywhere – rather than making the Tiber flow with blood once again.

A prayer for today

*Let my words be of peace. Let my actions be of reconciliation.
Let my attitudes be of healing. Let my purpose be of love. Amen*