

Salesian Family Days 2018
“The Art of Listening and Accompanying”

Accompanied to Accompany
Experiences of Paschal Dynamics

Hello everyone! We are Titta and Sebastiano from the Lay Spiritual Movement of the Salesian Family, the Witnesses of the Risen Lord. We are really honoured to be here.

We bring forth to you the experiences that we have had during these years as both accompanists and being accompanied. We really like the idea of creating a dialogue and a discussion on the theme of listening and welcoming that certainly has many nuances.

Before going into the matter, we would like to present ourselves. We have been married since 8th December 2012 and since September 2016 we have had the joy of being little Matteo's parents. For about 11 years we have formed part of the Movement of Witnesses of the Risen Lord: I, Titta, am the National Coordinator of the Youth Sector TR and I, Sebastiano, am an animator. Together we form part of the cenacle TR Castellammare2.

The greatest fortune has been that of having lived and shared the most important stages of our life together, of having matured together, having received a vocation to keep developing, always together - as boyfriend and girlfriend, as husband and wife and as parents.

The meeting with the Lord has changed our perspective. We were lucky to feel welcomed and listened to. We have been fortunate enough to always make the fundamental choices of our life together with the Lord. Perhaps on the day we chose to be accompanied by our spiritual guide we had not really fully understood and appreciated the importance of what we were choosing and to what extent this would broaden our horizons.

I, Sebastiano, am an actor and theatre director and I deal with theatrical pedagogy through theatre courses. My vocational, familiar, theatrical and pedagogical discernment is intertwined with that of Titta. Since Matteo is in our life, the Lord is asking us to reopen another chapter of great change. This involves modifying our schedules, our spaces, and being able to give voice to the vocation of work in another capacity. I, Titta, a civil engineer by profession, after working for three years in a studio (and after being a full-time mother for a year), I now see before me the prospects of new jobs to be experienced.

But how did we feel accompanied in all these steps of life?

In our experience, being accompanied has never meant to receive advice, solutions, directives or to be replaced in the choices we had to take, but our spiritual guide taught us to take care of us, to observe the presence of the Lord in our days, to take note of what He

asks us, to try to learn what His perspective is, to keep in mind our personal and couple project and to make frequent life verifications. He made us understand that the Lord is always calling us to share, discern and walk together. The richness of what we have lived and continue to live urges us to be accompanists of other young people. We are sure that without first experiencing being listened to and accompanied, we could not accompany others.

So ... where do we start from?

First of all, it is about feeling at home!

With our spiritual guide we always felt free to be ourselves, even when we disagreed or when we were wrong. We have always felt that before every thought, word or deed there is always the love for who we are. We always seek to do the same with the youths. They amaze us with how involved they can really become when they "feel at home". At home we know we can speak sincerely, we are able to show our vulnerability, to be able to expose our feelings, our ambitions, our desires, even the most hidden ones. We know that at home there are those who love us as we are, there are those who go beyond the spoken words and those who first of all want and seek together with us our pursuit of happiness.

We freely talk about the emotional, spiritual, sexual and professional dimensions... The relationship of trust that is established is based on complete sincerity on both sides. We are learning to not focus on ourselves (having to prove ourselves to be good accompanists) but to concentrate on the person we have before us. For a young person, feeling at home means feeling heard in the totality of their being as a person.

Educating for vocational culture

We have seen many young people grow up, taking important decisions, making mistakes and getting up again. We met those who approached the movement and then gave up, others who once arrived never left, and those who, having left, later wanted to return.

We are especially close with young people who are facing the world of university and work. This leads us to come in contact with those who find themselves faced with fundamental choices in their lives. The word vocation should not be scary. We note that there is a certain "vocational anxiety" ("What if the road I am taking is not the right one?").

The vocation for us is a continuous path, a letting ourselves be called and transformed by the Lord. It is to take root and at the same time be ready for change - we never arrive. One of the fundamental points of our accompaniment is this: To educate towards a vocational culture. Understanding the direction, how to live one's life and where to invest one's energies. It is always nice to see our youths walking along their paths (doubts, crises, discoveries, changes...). One of the tools we tend to find very useful for both the youths and ourselves is to write their own personal project: every year, in prayer, we take note of concrete objectives concerning every dimension of our life, from spiritual to emotional, from the working one to the community one, etc...

It is our present moment seen through the eyes of the Lord which shows us the path to be taken. It is an excellent tool to take hold of one's own life, to have a positive and proactive look. It is about engaging with the Lord and with oneself in order to not let the days and what happens to us slip away. It is to commit to wanting to be really happy!

Growth, discussion, sharing: journey in community

How do we overcome our fears? How do we free ourselves from what does not help us to walk? How do we imagine ourselves in this world of work? How do we make sure we are having sincere and long lasting affective relationships? These are some of the questions posed to us. These are always open questions that can be answered only in the intimate dialogue with the Lord and later discussed and evaluated with the brothers and sisters on the journey.

The accompaniment path is based, in fact, on fraternal and sincere discussion with the other youths of the group-community, on a systematic path of faith and friendship. We believe that discussion (in freedom and respect) creates positive dynamics that can confirm or confront the certainties that we are led to build in our mind.

Starting a personal journey does not mean looking only at oneself, at one's self-realization, but it means growing in the awareness that our human and spiritual maturation is also a gift for the others who are close to us. Obviously, in this case too, we must first live the community experience ourselves as accompanists in our cenacles / communities. Otherwise, what are we proposing?

Being mature in discerning

We have met guides who have attracted many young people and created beautiful projects. However, once they left the project, they left behind disoriented youths, young people who had probably learned to love the guide but not the community, the commitment and the Lord.

We are always careful not to create dependencies, because it is very easy to do so!

We were delighted to read in a community project of one of the groups we follow, "seeking autonomy from Titta and Sebastiano". This is the greatest victory, because we see concretely that the boys remain linked to the community, to the commitment, to the Lord. They have a lot of affection and esteem for us, but they learn to walk on their own two feet very well!

What keeps the desire and the joy of accompanying always burning in us is to see the boys grow and mature in dialogue, in prayer and in discernment with the Lord. The fruits, which we have the grace to see, are so many and they regularly surprise us and even go beyond our imagination. In fact, they teach us a lot and instil in us a desire to grow and always improve even more.

Paschal dynamics

In our opinion, the beauty of the Gospel is to always challenge and confront our perspective, to open ourselves to new dynamics and to confront our distorted human thinking. Jesus never answers questions in a clear way. Instead, He gives us the opportunity to read the answer in our heart, He sets us in motion. What is more beautiful than this? Sometimes we want to "extort" recipes and solutions from our guide, but we are learning to understand that he is not called to do this.

We try in our small way to oppose the belief that the central point is the answer, the result, the success. We ask ourselves and help the youths to learn how to recognize how precious every single step is. Jesus teaches us to put the person before everything. The person and their path, not the goal, achieved or not, but it is "how" they are proceeding to achieve it. It is He who gives us the example of the "how". We live the life of Easter men and women - persons who roll up their sleeves every day, in everyday life, among the brothers, at work, in the family, to overcome every form of "death" and feed every form of "life". This is the perspective we are trying to bring forward with our youths. This is a dynamism which involves us and our whole being every day. We are called to live Easter every single day!

It is fortunate to be able to dedicate ourselves to the accompaniment and growth of the youths. All that we have received and that we have understood in these years helps us to deeply understand the feelings, contrasts, doubts and uncertainties that arise when faced by fundamental life decisions. Many-a-time we happen to see ourselves in other people's life experiences and writings. We have been fortunate because we were made to understand that the Lord, first of all, wants us to be happy. This is not something that we take for granted, it is the starting point of everything.

Let us pray to the Lord that He helps us realise that we never arrive but are always on the way. It is important to remember that the most important thing we can give to our youths is our growth with Him.

Titta and Sebastiano

Movement of the Witnesses of the Risen Lord