

Matt & Rick Vidal Extended Interview
OwningOurFaith

Introduction

Matt: My name is Matthew Vidal

Rick: My name is Rick Vidal

Rick: I'm from Miami, Florida and I work for Google.

Matt: I'm from Long Island, NY and I work for Nickelodeon.

Matt: I am a practicing Catholic. I go to church every Sunday and on holy days of obligation.

Rick: Yes, as well I am a practicing Catholic and I go with Matt on Sundays to Mass.

Matt's Story

Matt: I always like to say that I didn't actually come out. I pretty much knew that I was gay once I started going through puberty and it's awkward because a lot of people obviously assumed that I was straight. I remember very vividly the first time I even learned that Christianity preached anything about gays. Was watching something on Ricky Lake, ironically, someone in the audience stood up and said something to someone up on the stage, you know, the bible says that you can't be gay. And I was so shocked and taken aback and I looked at the verse that he quoted, it was the Leviticus verse, and I immediately called the church and I asked to meet with this pastor friend who was a friend of the family and I sat down with him. He was always so kind, welcoming, he knew everything about me anyways, about school, my life, and I think I pretty much came right out and said you him, you know, "Father, I'm gay, and I am learning that the Christian Church, the Catholic Church, has some difficult thoughts on homosexuality and what does that mean for me?" And I remember that he actually told me something that was really impactful I still carry it with me to this day. He told me "St. Paul often writes about a thorn that's in his side and no one knows what that thorn was, but some scholars have speculated that it could have been, you know, something like this, you know, a same-sex attraction or something that was preached against in his community. And St. Paul became a huge inspiration in spreading Christ's message and growing the church and he's now one of the biggest saints of the church" so he said, "you know, all that matters is that your soul is good with God, you know the first amendment is to love one another. To love God and to love one another." And you're doing it and you'll be fine.

I was really fortunate to be a part of a parish that was always very encouraging. He couldn't have been better at welcoming me. And his, his, you know, concern for lack of a better word, was helping me to come out to my family, you know, what would that look like, how should I do it, what's the right way to do it, through feedback from him and other friends ultimately I decided I should tell my parents even though my brothers didn't have to. I should tell my parents and I should do it before I left the house to go to college because I didn't want every moment I came home from college to be this charged moment where I had to sit down and tell this big story to my parents. So it was a lot harder than I thought it would be and I remember I tried to make it perfect. I took my

mom to see a Broadway show, it was actually Jesus Christ Superstar, ironically and we saw the show and then you know at lunch I didn't want to ruin the moment so it didn't come up and then we went to dinner and I didn't want to ruin the moment so it didn't come up and we went back to Long Island and I just told myself I have to do this, I have to do this. We were driving home from the train and I actually parked the car, completely coincidentally, I parked the car in the parking lot of our church. It's a beautiful view of the, of the stained glass window of Jesus crucified, and again it was completely coincidental but we were sitting there and my mom knew I had to say something, she said, you know, "what's going on? All day long you've been wanting to say something." And I said yeah, I'm about to tell you something that's going to change the way you look at me forever. And she just had this look of panic in her face she didn't know what I was about to say. And I said, "I'm gay." And she said, "Oh, that's it?" She goes: "I can't believe it I thought you were going to tell me you murdered someone or you committed a crime or you did something wrong." And I said, "No, no but it's not the life that you probably thought I was going to be leading." And she said, nope, she said "that doesn't change the way I look at you at all" she said "the only thing I want to make sure is that you're good with your soul." And so I talked to her about how I had spoken to that priest who was our pastor and she was really happy about it and through the years and over time she's been a great advocate.

Rick's Story

Rick: I grew up in a very close-knit Cuban Catholic community in Miami. Both my family were very close, but very much a male, you know, dominated culture and I was the only boy so I was the favorite I like to say. I grew up in all Catholic school up through high school up until going to college. It wasn't that necessarily growing up there was anyone either through school or in my family that said anything outright, specifically saying, you know, "I hate gays." I very much was a child that internalized everything. I was constant reflecting still as an adult. And just little comments about anything you know sort of pile up in the back of your head. And we grew up also like another aspect of the Cuban culture is very much like, making your parents proud and all those things combined just and internalizing all of the messages that I was having was, absolutely was...you can't come out. Right? In my head what I told myself is, you know, I'm going to, I come from a long line of physicians, I'm going to prove to my parents that if I can follow down in the footsteps of my father and be just as successful then by the time that I come out they won't care. The larger community also won't care because I well I already have proven how successful I am. So I waited. I went to medical school, I found aspects of medicine that I was passionate about but it was really what I wanted to do long-term career but I pursued it for this reason, right? To really prove this to my family. And it wasn't until I was in my third year of medical school through the program and doing really well that I decided this is it. So I came home, told my parents to sit down very privately without my sisters in the room because I knew my sisters would be very relaxed about it, and said "I have something, you know, something serious to tell you guys about." and I mean I was trembling. I mean still, thinking about that moment, you know, so nervous about it. And my mother immediately, who is very dramatic, stood up, you know, and stood, and came around to the side of the table because she was just getting

nervous. She thought it was going to be something very serious. She said "you're dropping out of medical school," and I said "No." And she's like "well what is it?" I can't think of anything else that, you know, could be so bad and so serious for you having to sit us down like this. And I said "I'm gay," and by that point, I was already, you know, tearing up and crying, and she immediately, you know, smiled and just said, "That's it? I have a million other things to do I don't care". So she was very just humorous about it, very relaxed. My father, which is interesting, and he and I have a good relationship but he's not as, you know, talkative and outgoing as my mom. He was much more sensitive so he actually pulled me over and gave me a hug and just said "this is so OK with us".

How Matt & Rick Met

Matt: Rick and I met on Myspace, back in the days before Facebook was cool. Match.com and Eharmony at the time didn't allow gay couples to meet each other. So Rick was studying medicine and business at UPenn in Philadelphia and I was here studying law in New York, and it was interesting because I was actually on a hiatus from dating.

Rick: And I had abandoned the dating scene in Philadelphia so I was actually actively knowing that I was graduating soon, actively looking for New York so they had all of the different filters back then in Myspace which were awesome, you know. You could say, you know, you were seeking another...another man what city.

Matt: Yeah, it was a great search engine.

Rick: So I posted...

Matt: So he honed it down, found me, and he wrote me a message that wasn't like, you know those trite messages that you sometimes get that are just like "Hi, we should go on a date." We started emailing back and forth and we really liked each other and then we started IMing and phone calling. It was sort of very traditional and then after about a month of that Rick came to New York for a weekend because he had other plans here. And it was really just to go on this first date with me...and we hit it off very well

Rick: It was a date.

Matt: It was, yeah. It was totally a first date.

Rick: And then every other weekend after that we visited. In fact just two weekends after that I think when I was in New York I think was when I met your mom.

Matt: Yeah yeah

Rick: And at that point already, she asked me, "Ohh, ok, when are you guys moving in together?"

Matt: She did. And she will tell you, if you have the benefit of meeting her, she will tell you that that very first time that she saw me and Rick that she knew we were going to be together forever. That's right that was two weeks after we had met for the first time.

Rick: I mean I knew you were Catholic and in fact that was one of my mom's two requirements after I came out, she said "Ok all I want is that he knows Spanish and that he's Catholic." I definitely want someone who has their views and their faith.

Engagement Story

Matt: We actually got engaged on 6/7/8, so June 7th of 2008. So, we had been dating for...about a year and a half, almost two years. A little shy of two years, and that's when we got engaged.

Matt: Our proposal story is kind of amazing. Rick is really great at romantic surprises. We had discussed and we already knew that we had wanted to get married, or, or, we were...the person for each other.

Rick: I love to do surprises and I love to do creative things. And he said "Ok well you better get your act together quick because if you don't do it by the time I want to do it then I'm going to do it." So I got my plan into action and I wanted to present him with one hundred reasons why we should get married and I wanted it to be something that was very much a community. I gathered from our closest friends, fifty closest friends and family, their fifty reasons of why we should get married and a photo. I cleared all the furniture out of the apartment, we had this very modern building-type apartment with all glass front windows and I hung candles everywhere and blew up, emptied the entire apartment, all the furniture was gone so it looked like a gallery and blew up the photos of those fifty closest friends and family all over the apartment

Matt: I walked into the apartment it was completely empty as he said it was this beautiful site. It looked like a gallery. Out song was playing...and there was this big sign that just said "Here are fifty of the one-hundred reasons we should get married" and I just started crying ...I just sort of froze and didn't know if anyone was there and they weren't and I sort of just walked in and it was this surreal experience of just sort of...since the room was empty it was just our- our song was echoing everywhere and everywhere were just these beautifully placed pictures of our friends and family just like, smiling at me. It was so moving and so I went up and one by one I went through the whole apartment reading the fifty reasons for why we should get married and sobbed, obviously. And then when I got to the last one, there was, well he knows I like cookies, so there was a nice cookie at the end

Rick: I thought by this point he'd be hungry, after crying for an hour and reading fifty things so I left him a cookie and there was a note...a little note that says meet me downstairs there's a car waiting...

Matt: So I got downstairs, I get in the car, brought me to the pier over on 45th street and at the end of the pier, it was hard to miss, he was standing there with these fifty white balloons and on each of those balloons were each of his reasons to marry me. His own reasons. So I got there and we read the fifty reasons together and then he got down on one knee and proposed and I said yes, and then he had also gotten a ring for me to propose to him with. So I got down on my knee and proposed to him and then together we sort of lifted the balloons up and let them go into the sky like God sort of taking our relationship up into his hands and...it was gorgeous.

Faith and Marriage

Matt: Our faith is really important to us, and, you know, even though we're a gay couple we're actually fairly traditional, and we very much wanted the church, a mass, to be a part of our celebration. It was important to us and for our families so what we ended up doing was we had our civil ceremony at the time of our wedding. On the day of the wedding it was really important for us to have a mass, to have a Eucharist, you know. So...we just

had all of our friends and family go to a mass on that day, with us, and it wasn't about us, you know it wasn't the sacrament of matrimony or anything like that but it was really important to us, and it was very meaningful to all of our friends and family to share that for us, with us.

Matt: We promised to each other to be faithful and loving until we die and we promised that in front of our family and we promised it honestly before God even though it wasn't the sacrament of matrimony and we would have both really preferred actually to have a priest officiate.

Rick: Sure. It very much important to us that, you know, through this testimony the church just sees very naturally, you know, our love, the celebration of our marriage how much we care for each other, how much our family cares for us, and really is open-minded to embracing us, you know, as part of the community, because that, that faith and that part of the community is really important to us.

Matt: It's hard because the whole pride movement, right, is, is about being visible and sometimes that gets misconstrued I think some people think that pride is just about celebrating your sexuality which to some extent it might be but it really is about being visible. I think part of our notion here is to be visible, part of why we would encourage people like us to continue being part of the church is to be visible. I think the more that more people see us, and see that we're normal, we're just like any other Catholic married couple maybe they'll be more inclined to sort of drop that hesitation and that inclination of fear that they have to welcoming us more fully into the church.

Matt: All the basic tenants of faith are pretty much there in how we relate to one another, you know, loving each other, forgiving each other.

Rick: I'm better at that I think

Matt: Putting others before...He has to put me before him...No, putting others before you yeah I mean it's, it's sort of just that basic tenant of love and God being a part of everything being good people...that's, that's sort of what we bring to each other.

Faith and Family

Rick: We just started the process of adopting and we're really excited about it.

Matt: So, we're doing what's called an independent adoption, instead of an agency adoption and we essentially, with the lawyer's help market ourselves, put ourselves out there and explain our story to any mother that might be interested, or parents, who might be interested in finding two adoptive parents for their newborn

Rick: We would love to have two to three children both of us come from big families. I'm one of four siblings. Matt is, has, two other brothers, and his father actually has twelve brothers and sisters.

Matt: Yup my grandmother had twelve children

Rick: So very big families and they're only growing and I think that that...that sense of family has always been really important to us so we're excited about it.

Matt: Faith is going to be a big role in our family's lives. Right from the bat we are very interested we want our child to be baptized in the Catholic Church. Rick and I have talked about it a lot. I have very fond memories growing up, uh, with my faith. You know I remember very vividly my mom singing to me hymns and songs from church and just remembering a very fond relationship, a loving relationship with God, as a kid I remember it, and I very much want to teach that to our kid. I want our kid to always know, you know obviously we are the support system for our children but if for whatever reason they, they need more than that, God is always there, God's really always there. So even if they can't come to us, God's there and God loves them and they can always fall back on that. It's such a stabilizing, loving force through life. It's extremely important for us to have for our children.

Matt: Yeah. I think we're, we both very much want our children to be raised in the Catholic Church. It obviously starts with Baptism and it's going to go up through all the sacraments but fundamentally we want them to have that relationship with God, with Jesus, with the saints,

Matt: And if our kid ever did come out as gay or anything, I hope, as a parent, as a faith community, we instill in our children a comfort with God, right, so that they can, no matter what their struggle is at that moment, they can rely on God's love for them, and, and get through it. Know that, whatever they're going through whether it's being gay or whatever it is, God loves them and they'll be able to...they'll be able to be faithful, they should be faithful and God wants to be with them through that. And, you know, they can get through it with Him. And hopefully with their faith intact.

Formation of LGBT Church Community

Rick: Several years ago Father Gil approached us with a couple of other, community of gay members in the church, and we talked about we all had an interest in forming, you know a ministry, a gay ministry in the church. And I, at first, for one being part of that group was shocked that, you know, we were considering starting that up didn't know how everyone else in the broader community was going to react. And I still remember Matt at that first mass where he had to go up at the end of mass, you know, all the different groups, the youth group, and all the other different ministries give their announcements about this week's upcoming activities...and Matt had to go up there and I was just...super nervous, you know, in one of the pews, looking up, wondering what they're reaction was going to be at a very crowded mass. And he got up there, made the announcement, and everyone was supportive.

Matt: They loved it.

Rick: And...they loved it...and I...the first event had...

Matt: It was packed.

Rick: It was packed.

Matt: So many people were there.

Rick: So many people in attendance.

Matt: Clearly an interest.

Rick: Yeah.